

JEAN AMÉRY AND WOLFGANG HILDESHEIMER:
RESSENTIMENTS, MELANCHOLIA, AND THE WEST GERMAN
PUBLIC SPHERE IN THE 1960S AND 1970S

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The dissertation revisits the West German literary scene of the 1960s and 1970s to investigate how two of its Jewish participants, Jean Améry and Wolfgang Hildesheimer, sought to promote ethical responses to the Holocaust. The study incorporates literary analysis and socio-political reflections on the ethics of public life. First, it is an analysis of the relationship between judicial confrontation of the German criminal past, the silence in the wider German cultural sphere in the wake of this confrontation, and the two writers' efforts to expose and address this ethical disconnect (chapter I). Second, it draws attention to two very different modes of reactive affect, *ressentiment* and melancholia. Through readings of Hildesheimer's novels *Tynset* (1965) and *Masante* (1973) in chapters II and III, on the one hand, and Améry's essay "Ressentiments" (1966) and the essay-novel *Lefeu oder Der Abbruch* (1974) in chapters IV and V, on the other, the dissertation analyzes these two modes.

Hildesheimer employed a register of ethical writing that articulated the interconnected processes of mourning and melancholia, but unlike recent scholarship that focuses on these categories and valorizes melancholia as source of productive socio-political action, Hildesheimer did not prescribe them as exemplary modes of affective reparation. For Hildesheimer's narrators, mourning the victims of the Holocaust becomes an impossible task that leads to an affective and communicative

impasse of permanent melancholia. As Améry conceived *ressentiment*, it is, in contrast to melancholia, an affect that seeks to engage the wider community. If met with empathetic attention, Améry's affect of *ressentiment* enables future socio-political dialogue between victims and their community. Améry thus argues for the moral superiority of *ressentiments* as the most appropriate ethical vehicle to redress crimes.

By analyzing Améry's philosophy of *ressentiments*, which challenges the privileged position of melancholia, and by investigating Hildesheimer's approach to and ultimate rejection of melancholia, the dissertation argues for a nuanced understanding of the workings of affects and their ethical repercussions. The dissertation thus contributes to a growing body of international scholarship that elaborates—beyond melancholia and mourning alone—how various affects mediated in literature inform the ethics of public life after the Holocaust.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Melanie Steiner Sherwood was born in East Berlin where she witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall at the age of eleven. After a short-lived flirtation with mathematics she pursued a *Magisterstudium* at Martin Luther University Halle, Germany, in Anglo-American Studies and European History, with an emphasis on comparative judicial history of the early modern period. One year short of completing her degree she switched to a graduate program in German Studies at the University of Missouri, Columbia, where she was awarded a B.A. Equivalent for previous studies and received her M.A. in 2003 with a thesis on W. G. Sebald and Anselm Kiefer. She joined the Germanic Studies program at Cornell University the same year, entering the combined M.A./Ph.D. program. Since the fall semester of 2009 she has been teaching at Brandeis University as Lecturer of German in the Department of German, Russian, and Asian Languages and Literature.

To Erik

Ick dir ooch

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INTRODUCTION

Lot's wife is struck down because she turns her gaze towards the burning ruins of her homeland to witness the destruction of the city where she had experienced evil. Bible commentators excuse her death on the grounds that by looking backwards, she disobeyed God. Lot survives and procreates incestuously; his wife is petrified as a pillar of salt. The lesson is straightforward: to look ahead (into the future) means survival and safety; to look back (into the past) causes immobilization, even death. What remains is the uneasiness over a future generation that is tarnished—soiled perhaps because the future was imagined in ignorance of the past.

An ethical tension exists between past and future. The bidirectionality of temporal understanding affects the domain of public politics as well as the private constitution of the individual subject, and whenever the individual's gaze does not parallel that of the collective to which she belongs, her understanding of morality and the group's are at odds. Morality—whether it is committed to shaping the future and therefore prescriptive, or aimed at judging mistakes of the past and thereby reactive—relies on reflection on the past as a collective experience that must be sustained or bettered. For the group the ethical imperative to repair past damages allows for a future to be imagined in which the past will have been forgiven, but for the individual victim of wrongdoing, forgiving does not necessarily present itself as an option in the process of looking back. The purpose of historical justice, David Heyd writes, lies in restoring a desirable condition or, I would add, in (re-) erecting an ideal that describes a desirable condition, such that once restoration—of either the condition or the ideal—has been achieved, the past becomes morally irrelevant.¹

¹ David Heyd, "Ressentiment und Versöhnung. Zwei Antworten auf das Böse in der Geschichte," *Die Neue Rundschau* 113, no. 1 (2002): 110-29, here 113.

Because collective repair does not equal individual forgiving, for the individual this restoration might not be moral but constitute itself as amoral. Even if the collective has passed judgment and attempted to correct misdeeds, for instance by imposing punishment or by paying reparations, the harmed individual has no moral obligation to forgive, and more often than not she finds herself abandoned by the collective in her continuing demand to undo the injustice she experienced individually as subject. Only rarely does the individual succeed in articulating her subjective stance against collective forgiving that is measured on a scale of objective ideals. Behind such an articulation stand affects deeply invested in the past, such as melancholia and *ressentiment*, which are oriented reactively towards the past and are therefore deemed counterproductive by the social body at large. In this dissertation I attend to melancholia and *ressentiments* to analyze their ethical implications for negotiating between past and future.

In the wake of the Holocaust the Federal Republic of Germany implemented the program of *Wiedergutmachung* that accounted for the Nazi genocide of European Jewry largely through the payment of reparations and the judicial confrontation of a small number of Nazi criminals. While West German rhetoric fostered a climate of solemnity and remorse regarding the Holocaust, the unexpected economic miracle soon overshadowed early attempts at *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. In 1959 Adorno wrote about this practice of West German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, and his essay “Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit?” is a critique of the deceptive appeal of the notion of coming to terms with the past, which in the particular postwar context of the fifties amounted to a denial or dismissal of the past.² Adorno defends a more

² Theodor W. Adorno, “Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit,” in *Theodor W. Adorno, Gesammelte Schriften. Bd. 10/2, Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft II*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1997), 555-72.

exacting process, closely related to forms of socio-political practice, of participatory enlightenment regarding the past and its effects on present and future.

With this dissertation I ask how the demand for an ethical response to the Holocaust is met in the realm of literary and essayistic writing. Following the 1967 thesis of Margarete and Alexander Mitscherlich on the inability to mourn, scholars and cultural commentators tended to consider mourning the primary ethical response to the Holocaust within the interconnected spheres of socio-political practice and cultural production. Many accounts of postwar social and cultural history have emphasized mourning as a moral standard and valorized it, in the words of Anna Parkinson, as “an ideal incarnation of emotive reparation.”³ In her study of affect in postwar German culture from the immediate postwar period to the 1980s, Parkinson convincingly argues that this single-minded emphasis on mourning obscured the consideration of other crucial dimensions of affect and emotion at work. Since the 1990s scholarship has begun to acknowledge the critical handicap an exclusive focus on mourning imparts, and in the process some commentators have privileged melancholia instead. With the emergence of W. G. Sebald as one of the most influential German writers, attention turned to a melancholic writing style that is celebrated today as the ethically condign literary response to twentieth-century catastrophes. This focus on mourning and melancholia, I contend, marginalizes such negatively connoted reactive affects as anger and *ressentiment*. These affects are currently undergoing a reevaluation by scholars of transitional justice, and my dissertation takes a cue from this scholarship to examine the ethics of public life in West Germany after the Holocaust, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s.

³ Anna Parkinson, “Affective Passages. Emotion and Affect in Postwar West German Culture,” Diss. (Cornell University, 2007), i.

In my dissertation I revisit this period of the West German *Literaturbetrieb* to investigate how two of its Jewish participants, Wolfgang Hildesheimer (1916-1991) and Jean Améry (1912-1978), sought to promote ethical responses to the Holocaust. Both survived the Holocaust, one in exile and the other in Auschwitz, and emerged as writers following the two largest series of trials against Nazi criminals, the Nuremberg Trials and the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials, respectively. Hildesheimer and Améry both chose to live outside of Germany while participating in the West German *Literaturbetrieb* from the periphery. Hildesheimer and Améry, who never met, came from different backgrounds and experienced the Holocaust under very different circumstances. Yet the two authors worked within the same context of the postwar *Literaturbetrieb* towards a common goal, namely to engage their audiences in remembrance of the Nazi past. They did so by drawing on two very different modes of reactive affect, melancholia and *ressentiment*, which effectively called for different responses.

Because the literary careers of Hildesheimer and Améry were, in the beginning, closely entwined with the judicial procedures against Nazi criminals, I concentrate on the judicial confrontation of the past as one important aspect of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and *Wiedergutmachung*. My first chapter appraises this dimension in order to summarize a relatively well-known aspect of postwar political culture, to tie judicial *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* to the cultural arena of literary production where it found little resonance, and, lastly, to introduce Wolfgang Hildesheimer and Jean Améry as two voices who intervened in this atmosphere of silence, denial, and suppression. Chapter I is organized around the Nuremberg Interregnum in the intermediate aftermath of World War II and the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials of the mid-sixties. The two sets of trials serve as starting points for analyzing the relative silence of the *Literaturbetrieb* in the wake of the judicial

confrontation of the German criminal past. The first part of the chapter revisits the Nuremberg Trials and the question of German guilt as background to a discussion of the fledgling literary group, *Gruppe 47*, and its emphasis on war experience as catalyst for postwar literature, an emphasis by which the group's leading members, Hans Werner Richter and Alfred Andersch, effectively excluded emigrants and Jews from participating. One of the few Jewish contributing members of the group—though only beginning in the fifties—was Wolfgang Hildesheimer, who had returned to Germany from Palestine and England to serve as a simultaneous interpreter at the Nuremberg court.

The second part of the first chapter turns to the largest of West German trials against Nazi criminals, the First Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial, to contrast Jewish Attorney General Fritz Bauer's hopes of bringing the Holocaust to the fore with the trial's actual outcome. Jewish-German emigrant Peter Weiss's *Die Ermittlung* is the notable exception in a literary scene that generally paid very little attention to the trial, a condition on which literary critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki commented in his appeal to German writers to observe the trial. My comparative reading of the only two non-Jewish German texts regarding the Auschwitz Trial, personal essays by Martin Walser and Horst Krüger, shows that the majority of German writers, represented by the prominent Group 47 member Walser, by and large had no interest in confronting the past if framed differently from the war experience that served as the group's credo. By contrast, Krüger's empathic and self-critical conclusions were those of an outsider to the literary establishment. Krüger entered into a long-lasting friendship with Jean Améry, once the latter was provoked to break twenty years' of silence and, encouraged by the public attention the Auschwitz trial received, wrote the "Auschwitz diary" *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* that established him in the *Literaturbetrieb*, albeit on the margin.

Of the four subsequent chapters, two each concentrate on Hildesheimer and Améry. Because Hildesheimer is considered a melancholic writer—an assessment based on his prose writing of the 1960s and 1970s—I summarize the discourse of melancholia before critically engaging with the current intellectual trend of valorizing melancholia as an ethical response to traumatic events, which supposedly acts to catalyze socio-political action. Reinterpreting works by Sigmund Freud and Walter Benjamin, recent scholarship, of which Jonathan Flatley is exemplary (albeit not authoritative), has displaced an earlier focus on mourning and processes of working through by the contemporary emphasis on melancholic remembrance that, as I argue, impedes rather than promotes critical and productive engagement with the past by conflating cultural memory with the melancholic hypermnesia of trauma victims. While attempts at valorizing melancholia by associating it with creative productivity date back to the Renaissance and further, in the twentieth century György Lukács explicitly linked a melancholic aspect in novels to a utopian element that allows to imagine a better future. In the post-Holocaust context this linkage of literature and melancholia has become a subject of close scrutiny, in particular following Sebald’s emergence as the most prominent practitioner of a melancholic writing style lauded as responsibly engaging with the Holocaust. I argue that Hildesheimer’s novels *Tynset* (1965) and *Masante* (1973) serve as important predecessors of and stylistic guides to Sebald’s oeuvre. In my second chapter I conduct a reading of *Tynset* that focuses on the narrator’s traumatic “flashbulb” memories to analyze the novel’s melancholia. I do so to argue that the melancholic style, while defensible on the subjective level of the author and as an aesthetic choice, is ill-suited as a normative framework for engaging with the past.

In the next chapter I show that Hildesheimer arrived at the same conclusion with *Masante*. Drawing upon Stephan Braese’s seminal research on the author, I trace

Hildesheimer's development from a writer who believed in the political mission of literature (1952) and who, out of this conviction, chose to settle in Germany and take on the duty of writing in order to change society, into an author who, fifteen years later and in the meantime emigrated to Switzerland, had revised his position considerably. In the aftermath of *Tynset* and in reference to Adorno, Hildesheimer argued in 1967 that after Auschwitz the writing of conventional novels, which he defined as novels that ignore the reality of Auschwitz and the postwar disorientation experienced by those attuned to that reality, was no longer an ethically viable choice. He defended literature based solely on whether it conveyed the inner microcosm of authors who felt ethically bound to consciously explore the subconscious dimension that contained knowledge of Auschwitz. In the process, Hildesheimer hoped, these authors indirectly change their readers' attitude towards *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and the role of Holocaust remembrance in socio-political practice. This, he argued in 1967, was the limit of "literary engagement" (a term applied specifically to the political role assigned to author and literature). By 1975, after the publication of *Masante*, Hildesheimer finally arrived at the conclusion that literature, particularly as it regards socio-political change, had no consequence for society whatsoever. Even the engaged author is at the mercy of the reader and her willingness to accept the message of his work. Because he no longer saw a possibility to reach his audience, Hildesheimer stopped writing prose altogether. On a personal level *Masante* and its melancholic narrator had helped Hildesheimer to work through his Nuremberg experience, especially that of interpreting during the *Einsatzgruppen* trial, and to explore the Auschwitz dimension of his inner microcosm, which for him was marked by the affective disorientation produced by continuous fear. If in *Masante* Hildesheimer found a platform to melancholically mourn the past, he did not prescribe for his audience melancholia as affective reparation.

In my last two chapters I contrast melancholia with *ressentiment*, a reactive affect that Améry conceptualized as a direct intervention in the ethical landscape of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Améry's moral philosophy of *ressentiments*, which I link in chapter IV to the concept of resentment in moral philosophy and situate vis-à-vis a specifically German understanding of Nietzschean *ressentiments*, was not well received, for it challenges his German audience to acknowledge and apologize for crimes of the past committed in their names. Améry's *ressentiments* were misunderstood as recriminatory and vindictive, and his insistence on their moral purchase, which he argued in his essay "Ressentiments" (1966), was interpreted as bitterness obstructing social progress. I argue that Améry, rather than engaging in a series of accusations or demanding revenge, which was how both the text and his later public statements regarding violence were received, sought out the German populace—including generations too young for collaboration or participation in the crimes of the Nazis—in order to engage them in dialogue and encourage them to adopt an attitude of self-reflective mistrust similar to the concept of suspicion called for by Jürgen Habermas twenty years later, at the height of the Historians' Debate. Reading Améry's essay I argue that *ressentiments* point above all to an intersubjective dimension and serve as necessary and salutary stimulants of vibrant and participatory *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. *Ressentiments*, I conclude, present a viable ethical alternative to melancholia because they prompt active coming to terms with the past that translates much more readily into socio-political action than melancholia does.

Améry's demands were not met. Group 47 member Alfred Andersch deliberately misread "Ressentiments," and the general disinterest in answering his *ressentiments* led Améry, influenced by Jean-Paul Sartre's reading of Frantz Fanon, to a short-lived flirtation with theories of redemptive violence. My last chapter concerns Améry's *Lefeu oder Der Abbruch* (1974), a hybrid of essay and novel. Well-practiced

in essay writing, late in life Améry returned to his earlier ambition to become a novelist. In the essay-novel form Améry sought to work through autobiographical material essayistically in the fictional setting of a novel, for which he imagined a character who was acting on Améry's fantasies of violence. The issue of redemptive violence transformed the *Lefeu* project, which Améry had intended as an essayistic contemplation of referential language that he wanted to affirm in the narrative passages of the essay-novel. With my reading of *Lefeu* I argue that Améry, despite his fascination with redemptive violence, finally rejects it as a means of ending injustice. *Lefeu* must be understood as a product of Améry's evolving theory of *ressentiments*, in the development of which Améry emerged as a strong opponent of any valorization of violence. He returned to his philosophy of *ressentiment* as foundation of morality, albeit much disillusioned by the realities of postwar German society and doubtful that his *ressentiment* would be met with a response.

CHAPTER I

“Also es handelt sich, mit Verlaub, um Auschwitz”:¹ *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and Its Discontents

“[I]ch als Jurist sage Ihnen, wir Juristen in Frankfurt haben erschreckt gerufen, mit ganzer Seele gerufen nach dem Dichter, der das ausspricht, was der Prozess auszusprechen nicht im Stande ist.”² Thus did Fritz Bauer, the Hessian Attorney General and lead prosecutor at the first Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial (1963-65), lament the impotence of the judicial process in the face of gargantuan evil.³ A jurist’s charge is to decide guilt and innocence according to rules and procedures fixed by particular laws and doctrines; jurists distill past events down to a handful of facts that suffice to tip the scale of justice, but legal dictates allow for only limited considerations of relevant subjective experiences. How is justice served when legal cultures are bound by formal objectivity? Bauer feared that the Auschwitz Trial, in its quest for judicial objectivity, rather than illuminating the character of Auschwitz and the Nazi system of extermination camps, had abstracted it, distorting and vitiating its true horror. Conceding that jurists were forced, “Auschwitz juristisch zu verfremden,” Bauer urged poets to complement the courts’ presentation of factual evidence with description of subjective experiences of the crimes and thereby to promote “menschliche[s] Engagement” as protest when “Böses” happens.⁴ Bauer’s call was met with deafening silence.

¹ Marcel Reich-Ranicki, “In einer deutschen Angelegenheit,” in *Literarisches Leben in Deutschland. Kommentare und Pamphlete* (Munich: Piper, 1965), 201-204, here 201.

² Fritz Bauer et al., “Auschwitz auf dem Theater? Ein Podiumsgespräch im Württembergischen Staatstheater Stuttgart am 24. Oktober 1965 aus Anlass der Erstaufführung der *Ermittlung*,” in *Deutsche Nachkriegsliteratur und der Holocaust*, ed. Stephan Braese et al. (Frankfurt/M., New York: Campus, 1998), 71-97, here 76.

³ The abbreviation Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials (or Auschwitz Trials) refers to a series of three trials against personnel at the Nazi extermination camp Auschwitz, which were held in Frankfurt between 1963 and 1968, beginning with the 1963-65 trial, *Strafsache gegen Mulka und andere*, 4Ks 2/63.

⁴ Bauer et al., “Podiumsgespräch im Württembergischen Staatstheater,” 74, 76.

German writers' vast silence in response to the first Auschwitz Trial suggests that either they did not share Bauer's commitment or did not know how to articulate it. This chapter revisits the Auschwitz Trial and its limited impact on the literary establishment to point at lacunae in the West German landscape of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* vis-à-vis subjective experiences of German Jews during and after the Holocaust. Because they were largely excluded from constructing a communal public memory of the immediate past in Germany, German Jews sought alternative modes of articulating and coming to terms with their experience of persecution during the Third Reich.⁵

However muted the response to the Auschwitz Trial by established writers, the trial led Jean Améry to find his voice as a German-speaking Jewish writer and Holocaust survivor. Twenty years earlier, the Nuremberg Subsequent Trials (1946-49) had confronted another German-speaking Jew, Wolfgang Hildesheimer, with evidence of the terrible fate he himself had escaped. These two writers indirectly answered Bauer's call to speak to subjective experiences that the legal system failed to capture. Specifically, Améry and Hildesheimer voiced Jewish experiences of persecution, and they did so in distinctively different ways.

As a prelude to my readings of works by Hildesheimer and Améry representative of their intervention in West Germany's culture of memory, this chapter revisits the Nuremberg and Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials in order to trace the judicial foundations of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. This chapter additionally addresses the

⁵ For the impact of the Auschwitz Trial on literature, cf. Irmtrud Wojak and Fritz-Bauer-Institut, eds., *"Gerichtstag halten über uns selbst." Geschichte und Wirkung des ersten Frankfurter Auschwitz-Prozesses (Jahrbuch 2001)* (Frankfurt/M., New York: Campus, 2001). Stephan Braese analyzes in a seminal study the absence of Jewish-German voices in the process of constructing a West German public memory. Stephan Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung. Jüdische Autoren in der westdeutschen Nachkriegsliteratur* (Berlin: Philo, 2001).

trials' limitations, the failures of the literary establishment to engage with the Nazi past, and the biographies of Hildesheimer and Améry.

1945-1947: Nuremberg

Collective Guilt, Victors' Justice, and Kriegsverurteilte

Eight million Germans were members of the Nazi party on the day of Germany's defeat in World War II.⁶ Had U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt resisted the pressures of Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson and continued his support of Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau's plan for dealing with the Germans, anyone "closely identified with Nazism"—the majority of the male population—would have been arrested and, in the case of "arch-criminals," summarily executed by a firing squad.⁷ Fearing its disastrous consequences for the future stability of Europe, Stimson and the Pentagon vehemently rejected the Morgenthau Plan. Stimson instead proposed a "constructive approach" for securing peace that included a war crimes policy whereby an international tribunal would target certain members of the Nazi elite to be tried according to the basic guidelines of the Bill of Rights.⁸ Stimson's plan was realized with the establishment of the International Military Tribunal (IMT), on which the Allies and nineteen supporting nations agreed by signing the London Charter in August 1945. The structure of the IMT as well as the actual proceedings at the Nuremberg Trial were largely shaped by U.S. policy, which served three additional purposes beyond the main goals of trying war criminals and making war a crime: to

⁶ Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory. The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 202.

⁷ Henry Morgenthau Jr., "Memorandum for President Roosevelt," in *The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial 1945-46. A Documentary History*, ed. Michael R. Marrus (Boston, New York: Bedford Books, 1997), 24-26, here 25. Morgenthau's plan included limiting Germany's economy to agriculture, an idea to which Jean Améry later refers (chapter IV).

⁸ Henry L. Stimson, "Memorandum Opposing the Morgenthau Plan," in *The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial 1945-46. A Documentary History*, ed. Michael R. Marrus (Boston, New York: Bedford Books, 1997), 26-27.

secure evidence of Nazi crimes for future preservation, to bring Nazi crimes to the attention of the world, and to educate the German people and lay grounds for their democratization.⁹

In December 1945 the Allies also ratified Control Council Law No. 10, which established the IMT as a test case for future trials to be conducted by the Allied forces individually and within their zones of occupation against Nazi criminals charged with war crimes, crimes against peace, crimes against humanity, and membership in organizations declared criminal. Between November 1945 and October 1946, the IMT prosecuted twenty-four leading Nazis. Control Council Law No. 10 granted jurisdiction to the Office of Military Government, U.S. Zone (OMGUS) to administer twelve subsequent trials in Nuremberg, between 1946 and 1949, which targeted the second tier of Nazi officials, a total of 185 individuals from the SS, the civil service, the medical professions, the military, and industry.¹⁰ In addition to the IMT and OMGUS, the Americans prosecuted over 1,700 war criminals under the jurisdiction of the Judge Advocate of the U.S. Army, and with the largest number of prosecutions and the ambitious plan of reeducation, the U.S. emerged as the “political and moral leader of the effort to punish Nazi war criminals in Germany.”¹¹

Often lumped together with the IMT under “Nuremberg Trials,” the twelve subsequent proceedings in Nuremberg, although similar to the trial of Major War Criminals overall, differed in small but important ways. A team of prosecutors and

⁹ Cf. Peter Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute* (München: C.H. Beck, 2001), 42. For a detailed overview of the U.S. American program of judicial reeducation, cf. Frank M. Buscher, "Bestrafen und erziehen. 'Nürnberg' und das Kriegsverbrecherprogramm der USA," in *Transnationale Vergangenheitspolitik. Der Umgang mit deutschen Kriegsverbrechern in Europa nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, ed. Norbert Frei (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006), 94-139.

¹⁰ Jonathan Friedman, "Law and Politics in the Subsequent Nuremberg Trials, 1946-1949," in *Atrocities on Trial. Historical Perspectives on the Politics of Prosecuting War Crimes*, ed. Patricia Heberer and Jürgen Matthäus (Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 75-101, here 75f.

¹¹ Lisa Yavnai, "U.S. Army War Crimes Trials in Germany, 1945-1947," in *Atrocities on Trial. Historical Perspectives on the Politics of Prosecuting War Crimes*, ed. Patricia Heberer and Jürgen Matthäus (Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 49-71, here 67.

judges working exclusively for the Americans administered the later trials, which avoided intra-Allied tensions. During the IMT the American chief prosecutor, Robert H. Jackson, repeatedly had to remind other Allies—in particular the Soviets, who toasted to the death of all Germans—to preserve “detachment and intellectual integrity” in order to meet “humanity’s aspirations to do justice.”¹² During the Subsequent Trials the Americans adopted the safeguards from the Anglo-American legal tradition without intervention of other Allied powers. In spite of the “fairness and impartiality” that characterized these trials,¹³ Germans nevertheless accused the Americans of practicing victors’ justice: in the eyes of many Germans, the tribunals violated the *ex post facto* tradition, which holds that individuals may not be charged with crimes that were not illegal at the time of commission.¹⁴

This charge had already been the main legal hurdle for the IMT. The prosecutors tried to resolve it by arguing that Nazi Germany had violated three major international treaties to which Germany was a signatory: the 1907 Hague regulations on warfare, the 1929 Geneva convention protecting the rights of prisoners of war, and most importantly, the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact, which outlawed aggressive war.¹⁵

To circumvent legal issues of *ex post facto* rulings, the IMT decided to prosecute only those crimes that were committed as acts of war, excluding, for instance, crimes of Germans against Germans. The IMT therefore prosecuted “crimes against humanity” only if they related to starting the war or if they violated laws governing the conduct of war.¹⁶ This strategy led to the (mis-)representation of the genocide against the Jews as a consequence of aggressive war, rather than a result of

¹² Robert H. Jackson, "Opening Address for the United States. November 21, 1945," in *The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial 1945-46. A Documentary History*, ed. Michael R. Marrus (Boston, New York: Bedford Books, 1997), 79-85, here 81.

¹³ Friedman, "Subsequent Nuremberg Trials," 79.

¹⁴ Cf. Buscher, "Bestrafen und erziehen," 100.

¹⁵ Cf. Friedman, "Subsequent Nuremberg Trials," 81f.

¹⁶ Cf. Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, 44.

the racial politics of the Nazis. Although the Nuremberg Trial is remembered today primarily for establishing “crimes against humanity” as a criminal category, issues of aggressive war—“crimes against peace” and “war crimes”—actually dominated the agenda of the international tribunal. The IMT effectively marginalized the genocide of the Jews. For instance, the Americans deemed the 1944 massacre of American POWs by the Waffen-SS (at Malmédy) to be more important than the “Final Solution,” which the IMT discussed interchangeably with other Nazi war crimes.¹⁷

By prosecuting a much larger number of Nazi criminals, the Subsequent Trials implicated a broader spectrum of society. They examined “many aspects of Nazi criminality in much greater depth than (...) the IMT trial,” and called on “victim witness testimony (...), thus broadening and thickening depictions of the crime.”¹⁸ The first of the Subsequent Trials, the Doctors’ Trial, called into question the IMT’s practice of excluding crimes committed by Germans against Germans. It investigated the euthanasia program *Aktion T4*, which caused the death of tens of thousands of mentally and physically handicapped Germans between 1939 and 1941. Because of the limitations imposed by IMT regulations, the prosecution was forced to connect T4 to Nazi war crimes. It was eventually able to do, since T4 experimented with efficient ways of mass killings and was thus directly linked to the planning of the “Final Solution,” which in turn was equated with war crimes.¹⁹

The subsequent proceedings tried 177 defendants (eight of the original defendants had died or been too sick to be tried) and convicted 142, twenty-five of whom were sentenced to death; the remaining defendants were sentenced to an

¹⁷ Cf. Donald Bloxham, “Milestones and Mythologies. The Impact of Nuremberg,” in *Atrocities on Trial. Historical Perspectives on the Politics of Prosecuting War Crimes*, ed. Patricia Heberer and Jürgen Matthäus (Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 263-82, here 275.

¹⁸ Ibid, 274.

¹⁹ Cf. Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, 60.

average of ten years in prison.²⁰ However, changes in American policy towards West Germany affected the administration of the Subsequent Trials. With the termination of OMGUS (in 1949), the trials fell under the jurisdiction of its successor, the U.S. High Commission for Occupied Germany, and High Commissioner John J. McCloy took a much more lenient position towards the defendants than Henry Clay (of OMGUS). Telford Taylor, the chief prosecutor at the Subsequent Trials, reported in 1949 with concern that “the sentences became progressively lighter as time went on. (...) No doubt a number of factors played a part in this trend towards leniency, including (...) the shift in the focus of public attention resulting from international events and circumstances.”²¹ Taylor referred to the shift in American policy accompanying the emergence of the Cold War from denazification to reconstruction, integration, and democratization.²² Even before the subsequent proceedings’ completion, McCloy, responding to the pressure of American political leaders seeking to use West Germany as a bulwark against the westward spread of communism in Europe, addressed the issue of clemency.²³ After just a few years of Allied attempts at aggressive prosecution of Nazi criminals, a transition period followed of shifting priorities from confronting the Nazi past to Cold War politics. In the 1950s American policies effectively turned to the issue of pardoning war criminals still held in American custody.²⁴ Germany’s geopolitical significance for American foreign policy interests limited the extent to which the program of denazification and reeducation could succeed.

The general consensus by historians and legal scholars is that the Nuremberg interregnum (the IMT and Subsequent Trials), in spite of its shortcomings, mark, in

²⁰ Cf. Friedman, "Subsequent Nuremberg Trials," 88.

²¹ Qtd. in Friedman, "Subsequent Nuremberg Trials," 89f.

²² Cf. Joint Chiefs of Staff Directive 1067, signed by President Truman in April of 1945, to guide American occupation and denazification of Germany, and JCS Directive 1779, signed by Truman in July of 1947, to plan West Germany’s integration and reconstruction.

²³ Cf. Friedman, "Subsequent Nuremberg Trials," 93.

²⁴ Cf. Buscher, "Bestrafen und erziehen," 105.

Jeffrey Herf's words, "the golden era of judicial confrontation with the Nazi past."²⁵ The trials established beyond doubt that the Nazis were guilty of crimes against humanity, and Herf credits them for having "presented a detailed picture of the crimes of the Nazi regime in the postwar public."²⁶ However, as Donald Bloxham cautions, today's positive assessment of the trials distorts the fact that the West German people decisively rejected "both the medium and the message" during the time when the trials mattered most.²⁷ Much attention has been paid to the trials' widespread news coverage in Germany, often mistaken as indicative of a genuine public interest in the proceeding; however, most articles on Nuremberg were distributed by a single news agency controlled by the Allies.²⁸ A study comparing the news coverage of different Nazi trials, including Nuremberg, the trial of Eichmann in Jerusalem, and the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials, showed that the coverage of the IMT produced the largest number of articles, frequently appearing on page one. Unlike reporting for other trials, the news coverage at the IMT was consistent, unemotional, and neutral, and generated responses only once, namely *after* the pronouncement of judgment, suggesting that the population passively absorbed news of the trial but was emotionally invested only in the judgment.²⁹ Polls conducted by OMGUS further support the inference that the German population's interest waned dramatically; especially in the winter of 1946, Germans were little concerned with the trial.³⁰ The perception among many Germans that their own war-time suffering equaled and even exceeded the suffering inflicted in their name quickly shaped attitudes towards Allied occupation, and rejection of the

²⁵ Herf, *Divided Memory*, 204.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 207.

²⁷ Bloxham, "Milestones and Mythologies," 267.

²⁸ Jürgen Wilke et al., *Holocaust und NS-Prozesse. Die Presseberichterstattung in Israel und Deutschland zwischen Aneignung und Abwehr* (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau, 1995), 60.

²⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 65, 76, 81, 124.

³⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 128.

trials figured prominently among negative responses to the occupation.³¹ By the time the U.S. Army released the film *Nürnberg und seine Lehre* in 1948, there was hardly an audience left willing to see it.

The IMT failed as “Lehrprozess,” as Alfred Döblin had optimistically called the trial.³² The judgment of the Major War Criminals in fact furthered the self-understanding of Germans as victims of a Nazi elite perceived as “other.” In the case of military personnel Germans openly opposed the Allied judgment by arguing with an ethic of service to the state. This defense soon replaced earlier excuses of ignorance or powerlessness, and was increasingly applied to everyone the Allies prosecuted, regardless of crime or membership in the armed forces. The revisionist nationalism that subordinated German crimes to German suffering, and by which perpetrators became victims, was captured in the rhetorical shift from “Kriegsverbrecher” to “Kriegsverurteilte.”³³

West German politicians adopted the revisionist stance in reaction to popular demands to draw a final line. During his first public appearance in October of 1945, future chancellor Konrad Adenauer focused his address on the suffering of the people in Cologne. Though he subsequently lost his mayorship of Cologne, he was elected leader of the newly founded Christian Democratic Party in January of 1946.³⁴ Two months later, Adenauer explained his recovered pride in being German as stemming from the population’s ability to bear the burden of postwar occupation, evoking comparisons between the occupation and the Nazi regime as periods of equal injustice.

³¹ Cf. Bloxham, “Milestones and Mythologies,” 267.

³² Cf. Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, 46. Döblin used the pseudonym Hans Fiedeler. Alfred Döblin (=Hans Fiedeler), *Der Nürnberger Lehrprozess* (Baden-Baden: Neuer Bücherdienst, 1946).

³³ Bloxham, “Milestones and Mythologies,” 269f.

³⁴ Cf. Herf, *Divided Memory*, 212f.

His speeches of 1946 regularly included appeals to end finally (“endlich”) the prosecution of “Mitläufer” altogether and to try criminals in German courts.³⁵

Herf concludes from his analysis of postwar political speeches that “one could speak openly about the Nazi past or win national votes, but not both.”³⁶ Adenauer campaigned in the first German elections (in 1949) with a promise to end denazification and to fight for the amnesty of convicted Nazis, defeating by a majority of votes Social Democrat Kurt Schumacher, who had time and again during his election campaign stressed the importance of justice and restitution.³⁷ Adenauer won because he had “clearly expressed his distaste for extensive trials for crimes of the Nazi past.”³⁸

The Allies approached the Nazi crimes coolly with an appeal to rationality and justice in order to secure order in Europe. They never charged the populace with collective guilt. Robert H. Jackson, during the opening argument at the IMT, made it clear that the U.S. would not incriminate “the whole German people” for the “abnormal and inhuman conduct” of a few.³⁹ Reading the judgment on the crime of “the persecution of the Jews” one year later, Jackson stressed again “that mass punishment should be avoided” in favor of upholding the legal principle that “criminal guilt is personal.”⁴⁰ German intellectuals, however, discussed the question of the collective guilt of all Germans long before the Subsequent Trials at Nuremberg recognized that a wide spectrum of different layers of society had been implicated in

³⁵ Qtd. in Herf, *Divided Memory*, 213-221, here 217.

³⁶ Ibid., 203.

³⁷ Cf. ibid., 270ff.

³⁸ Ibid., 266.

³⁹ Jackson, “Opening Address,” 82.

⁴⁰ Robert H. Jackson, “Judgment: The Persecution of the Jews, September 30-October 1, 1945,” in *The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial 1945-46. A Documentary History*, ed. Michael R. Marrus (Boston, New York: Bedford Books, 1997), 234-35, here 235.

the genocide of the Jews, thereby suggesting that the majority of Germans was at least knowing if not complicit.

Philosopher and psychologist Karl Jaspers made the most famous contribution to the discussion over German *Kollektivschuld* with his 1946 *Die Schuldfrage*, which opened: “Fast die gesamte Welt erhebt Anklage gegen Deutschland und gegen die Deutschen. Unsere Schuld wird erörtert mit Empörung, mit Grauen, mit Hass, mit Verachtung. Man will Strafe und Vergeltung.”⁴¹ While he portrayed Germans as pariahs, he enriched the discussion of German guilt with a nuanced differentiation between types of guilt and responsibility that opened space for negotiating the future. Although his book was widely interpreted as an affirmation of collective guilt, he actually set out to dismiss the concept.

Jaspers first delivered his investigations into the question of German guilt as part of a lecture series, held during the winter semester 1945/46 at Heidelberg University. He recognized the lack of a “gemeinsame ethisch-politische Grundlage” as one of postwar Germany’s chief problems and the main obstacle to reasoned debate over guilt (17). This problem was the result of a population that had experienced the previous twelve years very differently: for those to whom 1933 or 1938 (the year of pogroms) meant an “Erfahrung der nationalen Würdelosigkeit,” 1945 marked liberation; yet for those who had supported the Nazis until 1943 or 1945, the end of World War II was defeat (16). The only way to bridge the gap was to investigate one’s past with a commitment to “voller Offenheit und Ehrlichkeit”:

[D]ieser Weg ist der einzige, der unsere Seele vor dem Pariaadasein bewahrt. Was aus ihm sich ergibt, müssen wir sehen. Es ist ein geistig-politisches Wagnis am Abgrund. Wenn Erfolg möglich ist, dann nur auf lange Fristen. Man wird uns noch lange misstrauen. (14)

⁴¹ Karl Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage*, in *Die Schuldfrage. Für Völkermord gibt es keine Verjährung* (Munich: Piper, 1979), 9-94, here 19. From now on page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

Being willing (and able) to talk about the past, accepting Allied occupation and embracing the IMT as opportunity for moral reversal were a start on the path towards rehabilitation from pariah existence. Jaspers had great hopes for the trial; he expected it to mark the beginning of a process that would eventually lead to a new world order in which human rights reigned supreme (42f.).

Jaspers distinguished between four different categories of guilt: criminal, political, moral, and metaphysical guilt. Though he considered only a small number of Germans to be criminally guilty, he held everyone to be morally accountable. The question of individual moral guilt is determined by one's own conscience. In contrast, according to Jaspers, all humans bore metaphysical guilt, a concept bound to the idea of God. Metaphysical guilt tied humans together in an "absoluten Solidarität mit dem Menschen als Menschen," and metaphysical guilt applied, for example, when "ich dabei bin, wo Unrecht und Verbrechen geschehen (...). Wenn es geschieht und wenn ich dabei war und wenn ich überlebe, wo der andere getötet wird, so ist in mir eine Stimme, durch die ich weiß: dass ich noch lebe, ist meine Schuld" (52). Anticipating the argument that policemen and soldiers could have done nothing to prevent the catastrophe, Jaspers wrote that answering to "einer absolut eigengesetzlichen Militärmaschinerie" was a question of criminal guilt to be decided in court, but not a matter of metaphysical guilt (53). As a consequence of metaphysical guilt, every German would have to renegotiate "sein Seinsbewusstsein und sein Selbstbewusstsein [in] der Einsamkeit des Einzelnen"; Germany's future depended on the collective outcome of this solitary act of reconnecting with the God-given metaphysical bond between human beings (54). His notion of metaphysical guilt concerned all Germans, but Jaspers contended that it was the individual alone who affectively experiences metaphysical guilt and confirms his relationship to God because of it.

Jaspers added to the discussion his fourth concept of guilt—political guilt, which derives from citizenship. Here Jaspers offered concrete guidance for all Germans about making amends for the crimes committed in their name. Using the terms political guilt and political liability (*Haftung*) interchangeably, Jaspers argued that political guilt entailed responsibility for past crimes, which is built on the relationship between every citizen to a given state. In a discussion of Jaspers, Aleida Assmann succinctly summarizes:

Politische Schuld entsteht als Haftung aller Staatsbürger für die Verbrechen, die im Namen des Staates begangen wurden. Sie sind schuldig nicht als Individuen, sondern als Kollektiv der Nation, das die Mitverantwortung aller mit einschließt. Die Strafen, die auf die politische Schuld antworten, z.B. in Gestalt der Einschränkung politischer Macht, der Auferlegung von Reparationen, der Entnazifizierung oder Wiedergutmachung, sind von der ganzen Nation zu tragen.⁴²

With the concept of political liability, Jaspers affirmed *collective liability* rather than *collective guilt*, which he explicitly rejected in any criminal sense. All Germans, without exception, share political liability.⁴³ In the section entitled “Politische Haftung und Kollektivschuld,” Jaspers concluded that political liability is “so etwas wie eine *moralische Kollektivschuld* in der Lebensart einer Bevölkerung, an der ich als einzelner teilhabe” (55f., emphasis mine). Although Jaspers was not primarily concerned with future generations of Germans, his concept of political liability extends into the future and applies until crimes of the past are amended.

While writing his lectures on German guilt in 1945, Jaspers reconnected with his former student, Hannah Arendt, whose article “Organisierte Schuld” he had just

⁴² Aleida Assmann and Ute Frevert, *Geschichtsvergessenheit--Geschichtsversessenheit. Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten nach 1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1999), 84f.

⁴³ Jaspers is not singling out Germans per se. All citizens of any modern state are politically liable, and in the context of Jaspers’ writing, the German citizenry serves as example to make this point.

read.⁴⁴ Arendt, who had written the essay in 1944, predicted an Allied trial of German war criminals, but was pessimistic about its outcome.⁴⁵ Arendt argued that in a country where the majority of the population had consented to the Nazi regime, the line between criminals and innocents was too blurred for the Allies to sentence any war criminals, “weil man niemanden finden wird, auf den die Definition des Kriegsverbrechers *nicht* zutrifft” (26, emphasis mine). Arendt stated that the crimes of tens of thousands of murderers had required the work of a whole people of “verantwortungslos Verantwortliche[r]” to maintain the “ungeheuerliche(n) Maschine des ‘Verwaltungsmassenmordes.’” For the Nazis to have successfully mobilized a people to aid in genocide proved to Arendt that the Germans were incapable of “Verantwortungsfähigkeit”—and what use would a trial be if those tried were incapable of understanding the concept of responsibility (31)? Hence she disagreed quite strongly with Jaspers’ later approach towards the IMT and the question of guilt. Reformulating her own argument, Arendt wrote in response to her former teacher’s differentiation of criminal guilt:

Mir ist Ihre Definition der Nazi-Politik als Verbrechen (“kriminelle Schuld”) fraglich. Diese Verbrechen lassen sich, scheint mir, juristisch nicht mehr fassen, und das macht gerade ihre Ungeheuerlichkeit aus. Für diese Verbrechen gibt es keine angemessene Strafe mehr; Göring zu hängen, ist zwar notwendig, aber völlig inadäquat. Das heißt, diese Schuld, im Gegensatz zu aller kriminellen Schuld, übersteigt und zerbricht alle Rechtsordnungen. (...) Mit einer Schuld, die jenseits des Verbrechens steht (...) kann man menschlich-politisch überhaupt nichts anfangen.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Cf. Jaspers, letter to Arendt, December 10, 1945, in Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, *Briefwechsel*, ed. Lotte Köhler and Hans Saner (Munich, Zurich: Piper, 1985), 62.

⁴⁵ Hannah Arendt, “Organisierte Schuld,” in *In der Gegenwart. Übungen im politischen Denken II* (Munich: Piper, 2000), 26-37. The article first appeared in English translation in 1945, and in the German original, which Arendt dedicated to Jaspers, in April 1946, in the journal *Die Wandlung*. From now on page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

⁴⁶ Arendt, letter to Jaspers, August 17, 1946, in Arendt and Jaspers, *Briefwechsel*, 90f.

In his response to Arendt's critique, Jaspers criticized her approach to dealing with the Nazis in postwar Germany:

Was die Nazis getan haben, lasse sich als „Verbrechen“ nicht fassen, — Ihre Auffassung ist mir nicht ganz geheuer, weil die Schuld, die alle kriminelle Schuld übersteigt, unvermeidlich einen Zug von “Größe”—satanischer Größe—bekommt, die meinem Gefühl angesichts der Nazis so fern ist, wie das Reden vom „Dämonischen“ in Hitler und dergleichen. Mir scheint, man muss, weil es wirklich so war, die Dinge in ihrer ganzen Banalität nehmen, ihrer ganzen nüchternen Nichtigkeit. (...) Ich sehe jeden Ansatz von Mythos und Legende mit Schrecken, und jedes Unbestimmte ist schon solcher Ansatz. (...) So wie Sie es aussprechen, ist fast schon der Weg der Dichtung beschritten. Und Shakespeare würde nie diesen Gegenstand angemessen gestalten können—ohne Unwahrhaftigkeit ästhetischer Herkunft—und er dürfte es darum nicht. Es ist keine Idee und kein Wesen in dieser Sache. Sie erschöpft sich als Gegenstand der Psychologie und Soziologie, der Psychopathie und der Jurisprudenz.⁴⁷

Jaspers took issue with Arendt's tendency to tie the genocide to something so vast and incomprehensible that it was in danger of being conflated with a myth or legend that might lend itself to aesthetic falsification. He clearly rejected Arendt's “poetic view of the Nazi crimes,”⁴⁸ contrasting it with the banality of evil, which Arendt would later use as the subtitle to her Eichmann book.⁴⁹ She clearly took Jaspers' critique to heart. She wrote in response that she certainly wanted to avoid ascribing satanic greatness to the Nazis.⁵⁰

Many Germans openly and vigorously rejected the idea of collective guilt, but they were reacting to an accusation that had actually never been raised officially: no document exists in which any of the Allied powers asserted the Germans' collective

⁴⁷ Jaspers, letter to Arendt, October 19, 1946, *ibid.*, 98f.

⁴⁸ Wolf Lepenies, *The Seduction of Culture in German History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 129.

⁴⁹ Cf. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York, London: Penguin Books, 1977).

⁵⁰ Arendt to Jaspers, December 17, 1946, in Arendt and Jaspers, *Briefwechsel*, 106.

guilt.⁵¹ Nevertheless, Dan Diner argues that Jaspers' discussion of the collective guilt thesis is one of the "founding text[s] for the new (West) German collective identity," adding that to this day the question of guilt is constitutive of German self-understanding and "can be sensed everywhere."⁵² The psychoanalytical concept of projection accounts for simultaneously internalizing and attacking the notion of collective guilt.⁵³ Stephan Hermlin, who reviewed Jaspers' *Die Schuldfrage*, early on interpreted the German defense against the (perceived) accusation of collective guilt as "Eingeständnis einer tiefempfundenen Schuld."⁵⁴ Helmut Dubiel argues that the German people had for so long identified as one *Volksgemeinschaft* that they approached guilt as a question affecting the collective. In doing so, Dubiel continues, they failed to engage with it in a differentiated manner on the individual level.⁵⁵

As part of their ongoing dialogue about German guilt, Jaspers and Arendt also addressed the possibility for the return of German Jews to Germany. Arendt declared that for Jews to live in Europe, a general acknowledgment of the crimes against them would be required: Jews could not simply return to Europe "als Deutsche oder Franzosen etc., als ob nichts geschehen sei." Arendt, who remained in the United States but considered writing in German for a German audience, told Jaspers, "Schreiben ist doch eine Form des Zurückkommens." She declared that she would like to write, but only for an audience that was fully aware of the genocide and welcomed her with this awareness as a Jewish writer.⁵⁶ Jaspers, whose wife was Jewish,

⁵¹ Cf. Helmut Dubiel, *Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte. Die nationalsozialistische Herrschaft in den Debatten des Deutschen Bundestages* (München: C. Hanser, 1999), 71.

⁵² Dan Diner, "On Guilt Discourse and Other Narrations. German Questions and Universal Answers," in *Beyond the Conceivable. Studies on Germany, Nazism, and the Holocaust* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2000), 218-30, here 219.

⁵³ Cf. Dubiel, *Niemand ist frei*, 71.

⁵⁴ Stephan Hermlin and Hans Mayer, *Ansichten über einige neue Schriftsteller und Bücher* (Wiesbaden: Limes-Verlag, 1947), 131. Qtd. in Stephen Brockmann, *German Literary Culture and the Zero Hour* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004), 41.

⁵⁵ Dubiel, *Niemand ist frei*, 71.

⁵⁶ "Mir scheint, keiner von uns kann zurückkommen (und Schreiben ist doch eine Form des Zurückkommens), nur weil man nun wieder bereit scheint, Juden als Deutsche oder sonst was

responded to Arendt with “volle[m] Beifall”: “Durch meine Frau ist mir das längst selbstverständlich.”⁵⁷ Sounding hopeful, in the same letter he mentioned a seminar he was teaching on Kant that was attended by intelligent young Germans eager to participate in the sort of discussion Jaspers had hoped for in his lecture on Germany. However, Jaspers became deeply disappointed over the next few years, for despite its discussions about collective guilt, the population was not interested in differentiated confrontations with the past. Jaspers and his wife left Germany for Basel in 1948; he explained their belated emigration with the Germans’ failure to meet the condition for Jewish life in postwar Germany: the acknowledgment of the genocide. He wrote, “Was uns forttrieb war klar: das Ausbleiben der Konsequenzen des Massenmordes an den Juden und der radikale Abstand vom totalen Verbrecherstaat.”⁵⁸

“*Die Folgen eines historischen Irrtums*”:⁵⁹ *New Rules of Literature*

On May 8, 1945, Klaus Mann entered Germany for the first time since his family’s emigration to the United States in 1933. He arrived in Germany as a member of the Psychological Warfare Branch of the U.S. Army, a capacity in which he had conducted interviews of German POWs since early 1944.⁶⁰ In May and June of 1945, Mann visited the concentration camps Dachau, Theresienstadt, and Buchenwald, and he concluded that it was the policy of mass extermination that was essential to Nazism, not, as the Allies assumed, the waging of aggressive war. Writing for the

anerkennen; sondern nur, wenn wir als Juden willkommen sind. Das würde heißen, dass ich gern schreiben würde, wenn ich als Jude über irgendeinen Aspekt der Judenfrage schreiben kann.” Arendt, letter to Jaspers, January 29, 1946, in Arendt and Jaspers, *Briefwechsel*, 68.

⁵⁷ Jaspers, letter to Arendt, March 12, 1946, *ibid.*, 70.

⁵⁸ Karl Jaspers, *Denkwege. Ein Lesebuch*, ed. Hans Saner (Munich: Piper, 1983), 51.

⁵⁹ Alfred Andersch, “Deutsche Literatur in der Entscheidung,” in *Essayistische Schriften 1*, Alfred Andersch. *Gesammelte Werke in zehn Bänden* (Zurich: Diogenes, 2004), 187-218, here 189.

⁶⁰ Cf. Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 52.

newspaper of the U.S. Army in Europe one month after Germany's defeat, he noted that the Germans' most often articulated sentiment was self-pity. Klaus Mann stated:

The German people show no trace of a sense of responsibility, much less a sense of guilt. They don't understand that their present calamity is the direct, inevitable consequence of what the German nation, *as a collective body*, has done to the world during the past five years. (...) They must not get away with their hypocritical pretense that they "didn't know" (...). Of course, they knew—and if they didn't, it was just because they found it more convenient to ignore certain ugly truths.⁶¹

Convinced of the Germans' moral bankruptcy and collective guilt, Mann, who had become an American citizen, decided that he would not resettle in Germany.⁶² He also warned his father, Thomas Mann, not to return to Germany either, for it was a "deplorable, terrible nation [that] will remain physically and morally mutilated, crippled, for generations to come."⁶³

The question as to whether Thomas Mann, the most accomplished German writer of the time, would return to Germany sparked "die große Kontroverse" of the immediate postwar period.⁶⁴ In August 1945 the co-founder of German PEN, Walter von Molo, published an open letter in newspapers in Germany, the United States, and other countries, urging Thomas Mann to return to Germany and help rebuild it. Von Molo assured him that most Germans had not supported Hitler and that life in Germany had in fact resembled life in one large concentration camp.⁶⁵ Like most

⁶¹ Originally published May 13, 1945. Klaus Mann, "The Job Ahead in Germany," in *Mit dem Blick nach Deutschland. Der Schriftsteller und das politische Engagement*, ed. Michael Grunewald (Munich: Ellermann, 1985) 116-21, here 119. Qtd. in Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 52.

⁶² Klaus Mann, "Ich bin kein Deutscher," in *Auf verlorenem Posten. Aufsätze, Reden, Kritiken 1942-1949*, ed. Uwe Naumann and Michael Töteberg (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1994), 467-69, here 467. Qtd. in Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 56.

⁶³ Klaus Mann, letter to Thomas Mann, May 16, 1945, Klaus Mann, *Briefe und Antworten, Bd. 2*, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin (Munich: Spangenberg im Ellermann-Verlag, 1975), 540. Qtd. in Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 53.

⁶⁴ Cf. the 1963 book title, J.F.G. Grosser, ed. *Die große Kontroverse. Ein Briefwechsel um Deutschland* (Hamburg: Nagel, 1963).

⁶⁵ Cf. Brockmann, *Zero Hour*, 94.

Germans, von Molo portrayed Germany as two countries, one being the Nazi regime, and the other—inhabited by the majority, who were the true and good Germans—having been subjugated to evil forces. The writer Frank Thiess aligned himself with von Molo in asking Mann to return but took a sharper tone in an open letter defending writers of the so-called internal (or inner) emigration, who supposedly shared the suffering of the German people while resisting Nazism intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally, rather than abandoning their home country as Thiess implied that Mann had done. Eliding the fact that most emigrants had been forced out of Germany, Thiess evoked the Nazi rhetoric of German blood and soil when he accused Mann of having forfeited his right to be a German writer by giving up “German space, German earth, and the echo of German people.”⁶⁶

Unlike von Molo and Thiess, Thomas Mann had rejected the idea of two Germanys, most explicitly in a speech held at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., in 1945.⁶⁷ In addition, Mann published an open letter, “Warum ich nicht nach Deutschland zurückkehre,” in which he not only insisted that he would always remain a German writer but dismissed all literature produced in Germany under the Nazis on grounds of complicity with the regime.⁶⁸ Mann’s letter was met with a host of opinions articulated in print and on radio, and Stephan Braese speculates that a large majority of the German population followed the erupting controversy closely.⁶⁹ The debate reached its culmination in 1946, when popular author Erich Kästner called it

⁶⁶ Qtd. in *ibid.*, 98.

⁶⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 92. Thomas Mann, *Deutschland und die Deutschen (1945)*, ed. Sabine Groenewold (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1992).

⁶⁸ Thomas Mann, “Warum ich nicht nach Deutschland zurückgehe. Offener Brief an Walter Molo (September 1945),” in *Thomas Mann, Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden. Bd. XII Reden und Aufsätze II* (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer 1965) 953-62.

⁶⁹ Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 33.

foolishness to ask Mann to return: “Es war eine Torheit, ihn zu rufen. Man hätte ihn viel eher bitten müssen, nur ja und auf alle Fälle drübenzubleiben.”⁷⁰

The debate directly engaged emigrant writers and those who had remained in Germany, setting the tone for the future of German literature in important ways. Moreover, it served as a forum for ongoing discussion between Germans at home and abroad on the highly emotional question of German complicity. The debate figured importantly as a screen onto which Germans projected unresolved feelings of guilt. Mann became a target because many Germans viewed his series of BBC radio addresses, *Deutsche Hörer* (1941-1945), as attacking them for having failed to emigrate or resist the Nazis.⁷¹ Emigrant Hans Mayer noted upon his return to Germany that most Germans viewed repatriates (“Remigranten”) as traitors who had actively contributed to the Allied efforts to defeat Germany.⁷² As Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich argued in *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern* in 1967, the Germans now understood that there had been an alternative to Nazism that they had failed to seek. This realization caused “Neid auf die größere Schuldlosigkeit,” kept in check by the insistence that emigration was a “Feigheit; Fahnenflucht.”⁷³ The fabrication of an internal emigration as a movement of resistance to which one claimed membership served solely as defense against accusations of complicity. Most Germans who paid attention to the debate were concerned not with its literary character but with the greatest question of the day on which it touched: the Germans’ collective guilt.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Qtd. in *ibid.*, 39.

⁷¹ Thomas Mann, *Deutsche Hörer! 55 Radiosendungen nach Deutschland* (Stockholm: Bermann-Fischer, 1945).

⁷² Cf. Brockmann, *Zero Hour*, 96.

⁷³ Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern. Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* (Munich: Piper, 2001), 68.

⁷⁴ Jaspers, who recognized the German interest in the Mann case as engagement with the idea of collective guilt, only hesitantly addressed the issue in a letter to Arendt. Jaspers appreciated Mann as writer but disagreed with his 1945 speech on Germany. He would like to believe in Mann as “Ethiker” but told Arendt that, if “hier die Verwirrung durch ihn nicht behoben wird,” he would have to openly criticize Mann for giving the impression that all Germans were collectively guilty. Jaspers, letter to Arendt, December 10, 1945, in Arendt and Jaspers, *Briefwechsel*, 63.

As a literary debate, the discussion of Mann's return presaged the marginalization of exiled writers that would characterize much of the postwar West German *Literaturbetrieb* (as distinguished from German literature as such). As Braese observes, the debate excluded Jewish writers altogether from the process of defining a new literature: Mann stood on one side, speaking for German writers in exile *without* representing Jewish German writers, and members of the internal emigration stood on the other, infusing the debate with an "Ausschlusscharakter" that kept Jews from participating.⁷⁵

The publication of the bi-weekly journal *Der Ruf* further evidenced this excluding process. The journal's editors, Alfred Andersch and Hans Werner Richter, who had undergone a reeducation and democratization program while in custody at American POW camps in Rhode Island, returned to Germany as so-called Selected Citizens with the task to establish democracy, and were given a license to publish within the American occupation zone.⁷⁶ But because their rhetoric, with its emphasis of the German defeat as a new beginning for a generation "zwischen 18 und 35 Jahren, getrennt von den Älteren durch ihre *Nicht-Verantwortlichkeit* für Hitler,"⁷⁷ violated American directions to engage all Germans and educate them regarding their past crimes, the license was revoked after just eight months.⁷⁸ During those eight months,

⁷⁵ Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 39.

⁷⁶ Cf. Volker Christian Wehdeking, *Der Nullpunkt. Über die Konstituierung der deutschen Nachkriegsliteratur (1945-1948) in den amerikanischen Kriegsgefangenenlagern* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1971); Wilfried Will, "The Agenda of Re-education and the Contributors of *Der Ruf* 1946-47," in *The Gruppe 47 Fifty Years On. A Re-Appraisal of Its Literary and Political Significance*, ed. Stuart Parkes and John J. White (Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 1999).

⁷⁷ Alfred Andersch, "Das junge Europa formt sein Gesicht," in *Alfred Andersch, Gesammelte Werke in zehn Bänden. Essayistische Schriften I*, ed. Dirk Lamping (Zurich: Diogenes, 2004), 17-23, here 22.

⁷⁸ Richter and Andersch lost their publishing license because the Americans suspected them of employing the rhetoric of the young generation in order to spread "eine orthodox-nationalistische Propaganda zugunsten von Gesichtspunkten (...), die Deutschland eigentlich mit der Niederlage Hitlers aus den Augen verloren haben sollte." Carl-Hermann Ebbinghaus, open letter commenting on *Der Ruf* in 1947. Qtd. in Alfred Andersch, "Böse Träume. Erinnerungen an Nachkrieg, 'Ruf'-Verbot und Währungsreform," in *Anfänge westdeutscher Nachkriegsliteratur. Aufsätze, Interviews, Materialien*, ed. Volker Wehdeking (Aachen: Alano Verlag, 1989), 193-200, here 196. Cf. Ralf Schnell, *Geschichte der deutschsprachigen Literatur seit 1945* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2003), 79.

between August 1946 and March 1947, Andersch and Richter used *Der Ruf* as a platform to mobilize young war returnees against the Allied occupation, to oppose charges of collective guilt, and to promulgate the idea that the end of the war left a blank slate that absolved them for their actions in the past (including their own: Richter and Andersch had been members of the *Reichsschrifttumskammer*⁷⁹). Subtitled *Unabhängige Blätter der jungen Generation*, their publication resonated well with those who interpreted “the generational divide [as] some kind of absolution from Nazism.”⁸⁰ In commentary on the IMT in Nuremberg, Andersch defended young Germans and their “erstaunlichen Waffentaten” and disconnected them from “[den] ‘Taten’ etwas älterer Deutscher, die gegenwärtig in Nürnberg verhandelt werden.”⁸¹ He carefully avoided any mention of the extermination of the Jews, putting deeds in quotation marks (“Taten”); in the sentence that followed he cited crimes in Dachau and Buchenwald but omitted any reference to Auschwitz.

Der Ruf also served as Richter and Andersch’s megaphone to conceptualize what they considered a new literature. In the editorial pages of the first issue, “Das junge Europa formt sein Gesicht,” Andersch emphasized the shared experience of war as the condition for participation in the shaping of postwar Germany. In this view not “re-education” by the Allies but the contemplation of “das große Erlebnis” of warfare would be the source of German political and cultural renewal.⁸² Richter elaborated in the second issue on *Erlebnis* as a decisive factor for the generation in charge of

⁷⁹ Cf. Brockmann, *Zero Hour*, 11f.

⁸⁰ Will, “The Agenda of Re-education,” 7. Cf. Sigrid Weigel, “Die ‘Generation’ als symbolische Form. Zum genealogischen Diskurs im Gedächtnis nach 1945,” *figurationen: gender, literatur, kultur* (August 2000); A. D. Moses, “The Forty-Fivers. A Generation Between Fascism and Democracy,” *German Politics and Society* 50 (Spring 1999).

⁸¹ Alfred Andersch, “Notwendige Aussage zum Nürnberger Prozeß,” in *Alfred Andersch, Gesammelte Werke in zehn Bänden. Essayistische Schriften 1*, ed. Dirk Lamping (Zurich: Diogenes, 2004). The article appeared in the first issue of *Der Ruf*, August 15, 1946.

⁸² Andersch, “Das junge Europa,” 20f.

rebuilding Germany;⁸³ elsewhere he claimed “die Erfahrung der Erlebnisse” to be the source from which soldiers would give birth to a new literature.⁸⁴ In his analysis of *Der Ruf* Klaus Briegleb charges Andersch and Richter with prolonging the soldier experience by actively using military language and an emphasis on camaraderie to exclude exiled Germans and German Jews from participating in shaping the public attitudes and literature of postwar Germany.⁸⁵ Mention was made of political prisoners in concentration camps and Germans in displaced persons camps, but German Jews or extermination camps were left out of any discussion in *Der Ruf*; exiled Germans were addressed only when Andersch demanded of them to return to Germany: “Emigration kann überhaupt nur leben aus der Erwartung der Heimkehr.”⁸⁶

Once they had lost their publishing license, Andersch and Richter shifted their efforts to organizing a literary circle, *Gruppe 47*. The group’s history, its meaning for West German literature, and its role in the cultural sphere have been thoroughly assessed.⁸⁷ As recently as 1989, Volker Wehdeking celebrated Richter for providing a forum for literary production during years of postwar chaos and thereby laying the

⁸³ Hans Werner Richter, “Warum schweigt die junge Generation?,” in *Der Ruf. Eine deutsche Nachkriegszeitung*, ed. Hans Schwab-Felisch (Munich: dtv, 1962), 29-33.

⁸⁴ Hans Werner Richter, “Literatur im Interregnum,” *Der Ruf* 2 (1946). Qtd. in Klaus Briegleb, “‘Neuanfang’ in der westdeutschen Nachkriegsliteratur. Die Gruppe 47 in den Jahren 1947-1951 (1994),” in *Bestandsaufnahme. Studien zur Gruppe 47*, ed. Stephan Braese (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1999), 35-63.

⁸⁵ Cf. ch. 5, Klaus Briegleb, *Missachtung und Tabu. Eine Streitschrift zur Frage: ‘Wie antisemitisch war die Gruppe 47?’* (Berlin, Vienna: Philo, 2003).

⁸⁶ Andersch, “Das junge Europa,” 20, 22.

⁸⁷ Cf. Stephan Braese, ed. *Bestandsaufnahme. Studien zur Gruppe 47* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1999). Braese’s collection includes Klaus Briegleb’s 1994 article, “‘Neuanfang’ in der westdeutschen Nachkriegsliteratur. Die Gruppe 47 in den Jahren 1947-1951” (35-63); this article marks the beginning of a critical re-assessment of Gruppe 47 that departs from older appraisals of the group. The article laid the foundation for Briegleb’s book-length investigation of anti-Semitic behavior within the group, cf. Briegleb, *Missachtung und Tabu*. Other critical investigations of the group include: K. Stuart Parkes and John J. White, eds., *The Gruppe 47, Fifty Years On. A Re-Appraisal of Its Literary and Political Significance* (Amsterdam, Ga.: Rodopi, 1999); Heinz Ludwig Arnold, *Die Gruppe 47* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2004); Justus Fetscher et al., eds., *Die Gruppe 47 in der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1991); Hermann Kinder, *Der Mythos der Gruppe 47* (Eggingen: Edition Isele, 1991); Heinz Ludwig Arnold, ed. *Die Gruppe 47. Ein kritischer Grundriss, Text + Kritik* (Munich: Edition Text + Kritik, 1987).

foundations for “Trauerarbeit” that began with the publication of Günter Grass’s *Die Blechtrommel* and Heinrich Böll’s *Billard um halb zehn* in 1959.⁸⁸ The success of both novels established the group’s reputation as the conscience of West Germany: Gruppe 47 was known for opposing Nazism and the Adenauer era of restoration, and for effectively promoting *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. In the last fifteen years, however, scholars have reevaluated Group 47 and identified many of its attributed characteristics as myths. For instance, while the public saw the group as opposing the Adenauer administration, most of the group’s members distanced themselves from politics not because of opposition but indifference; those who actually pursued distance from the regime—Günter Eich, Ilse Aichinger, Ingeborg Bachmann, and Wolfgang Hildesheimer—were marginalized within the group.⁸⁹ Furthermore, by inviting the leading figures of the *Literaturbetrieb* into the group and fostering connections between authors and literary agents, editors, and reviewers, Richter effectively managed the marketability of the group and guaranteed its participation in the West German economic miracle rather than establishing it as opposition.

The early group was recruited primarily from contributors to *Der Ruf*; Richter controlled the membership to realize his and Andersch’s vision of young, innocent war returnees who would shape postwar society. The group thus excluded former Nazis, anyone older than forty, and those belonging to the inner emigration.⁹⁰ Because the group members’ war experiences condensed into a single “’Erlebnis,’ das nicht zu debattieren war,” the exclusive emphasis of this ur-experience as the foundation for literary production also kept emigrants and Jewish writers from participating in the

⁸⁸ “Grund genug, den Gründer und Vater der Gruppe heute zu feiern.” Volker Wehdeking, “Konturen einer Übergangsperiode. Die frühe Gruppe 47 (1945-1952),” in *Anfänge westdeutscher Nachkriegsliteratur. Aufsätze, Interviews, Materialien*, ed. Volker Wehdeking (Aachen: Alano Verlag, 1989), 11-26, here 24.

⁸⁹ Cf. Georg Guntermann, “Einige Stereotype zur Gruppe 47,” in *Bestandsaufnahme. Studien zur Gruppe 47*, ed. Stephan Braese (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1999), 11-34, here 26f.

⁹⁰ Cf. Briegleb, “Neuanfang,” 50; Briegleb, *Missachtung und Tabu*, 247.

group.⁹¹ As Briegleb contends, all future members of the group had indeed returned from the war without a sense of guilt but with a feeling of having been betrayed by their superiors, who had left them vulnerable as targets of Allied hatred. Briegleb quotes group member Heinz Friedrich, who felt hated by the Poles and the French and compared himself to Jews *if* they were to become targets of anti-Semitism: “Und da fühle ich mich betroffen ebenso, wie sich der Jude betroffen fühlte, wenn man gegen das Jüdische vorgehe.”⁹² The comparison of a German World War II veteran to a Jewish victim of anti-Semitism, and the use of the subjunctive, suggesting that Friedrich doubts anti-Semitism was practiced in Nazi Germany, shows an incredible disregard for the immediate past. At the same time, however, a concurrent past offered *Erlebnis* of war as the founding principle for the future and was constantly invoked. The past was thus simultaneously called upon and suppressed. This process was evidenced when *Gruppe 47* members evoked death, fire, camps, trains, and terror, but refer to exclusively German experiences: DP camps, war returnees in trains, burning German cities. Briegleb calls this practice “*Hineinsehenmüssen und Wegschreiben*.”⁹³

At the second group meeting in November 1947, Andersch read from his essay, “Deutsche Literatur in der Entscheidung.” This was the only essay ever to be presented at a meeting,⁹⁴ as Richter generally opposed essays because they led “zu Grundsatzdiskussionen, von denen es in anderen Gremien mehr als genug gab. Wir wollten es [sic] nicht. Sie standen unserer Absicht im Weg.”⁹⁵ Andersch’s reading thus marked an extraordinary occasion, and his essay was furthermore received

⁹¹ Briegleb, “Neuanfang,” 51. Cf. Weigel, “‘Generation’ als symbolische Form.”

⁹² Qtd. in Briegleb, “Neuanfang,” 54f.

⁹³ Ibid., 58.

⁹⁴ Cf. Guntermann, “Einige Stereotype,” 19.

⁹⁵ Hans Werner Richter and Hans A. Neunzig, *Hans Werner Richter und die Gruppe 47* (Munich: Hymphenburger, 1979), 88.

extraordinarily, namely with almost no criticism but unanimous agreement.⁹⁶ With the essay, Andersch attempted to analyze the literary situation of the postwar era and, as the title indicates, sought to clarify that German literature was at a decisive point that would determine its future orientation. Andersch set out his position vis-à-vis the inner emigration, which he defended against accusations of guilt made by exiled Germans abroad and “einigen hohen Wortführern der deutschen Intellektualität im Inlande”—undoubtedly references to Jaspers and Mann.⁹⁷ Andersch put forward the obscure argument that the aesthetic and the inhumane were categories that could never co-exist; therefore literature automatically meant resistance to what he dubiously referred to as the “historische[n]” or “deutsche[n]” Irrtum” (189f.). The mere existence of literature proved, according to him, “die Absurdität der Behauptung” of collective guilt (192). Stylistically, however, the inner emigration failed; it produced mere “Kalligraphie” rather than literature (197). Andersch opposed the inner emigration to authors in exile, insisting that literature produced in emigration noticeably lacked something crucial that only the proximity to the German language and the “Strom des deutschen Lebens” offered (202). Echoing Thiess in the controversy surrounding Mann’s return, Andersch declared that exile writers could contribute to German literature only if they returned to Germany (203). Having thus acknowledged authors of both inner and actual emigration while simultaneously criticizing the stylistic choices of both groups, Andersch introduced an alternative to the literatures produced by both types of emigration.

⁹⁶ Cf. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard, “Zur Dramaturgie einer Abwesenheit. Alfred Andersch und die Gruppe 47,” in *Bestandsaufnahme. Studien zur Gruppe 47*, ed. Stephan Braese (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1999), 87-101, here 98. The meetings were notorious for the so-called electric chair from which authors would read their work and silently receive criticism, awaiting the hand signal—often from Andersch—that indicated failure. Cf. Briegleb, “Neuanfang,” 40f. Andersch’s essay presentation marked a special occasion because Richter allowed for a completely new format: Andersch read after dinner on the last day of the meeting; he had the final word, so to speak. Cf. Guntermann, “Einige Stereotype,” 19.

⁹⁷ Andersch, “Deutsche Literatur in der Entscheidung,” 190. From now on page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

Rather than being trapped in isolation (actual emigration) or in “Sackgassen der Form” (inner emigration), the young generation—represented by the members of *Gruppe 47*—began from a “[t]abula rasa” with “einem originalen Schöpfungsakt” that would bring about the “Erneuerung des deutschen geistigen Lebens” (210).⁹⁸ Andersch speaks of a “Vorgefühl eines originalen Neu-Werdens” (211) that will lead his generation, unified by the intensity of *Erlebnis*, to “reine[m] Realismus” (212). The only obstacle his generation must surmount in order to fulfill its historical mission is overcoming Allied occupation, which Andersch compares to colonial power. It is the writer’s duty to fight against the Allies’ colonial measures, which have been sanctioned “durch die *aufgedrungene Anerkennung einer Kollektivschuld*” (214, emphasis mine). According to Andersch, German literature needs to free the German people from accusations of collective guilt; it needs to reveal the Allies’ appeal to the “höchste[n] ethische[n] Postulate[n]” of human rights as a mask behind which they hide plans for a war between capitalism and communism; therefore, German literature also needs to deny the value systems presented by the Allies (215).

Twice in the essay, Andersch insists on the German writer’s ability to practice reflective self-criticism: in shaking off the Allied accusation of guilt (214) and in practicing a tolerance that is more far-reaching than “[d]ie Moral von Lessings Ringparabel” (217).⁹⁹ It is astounding that in the two instances where Andersch evokes the necessity for self-criticism, he lacks precisely what he advocates. Prescribing self-criticism as an antidote to guilt charges and suggesting that self-reflection is a tool with which one proves one’s innocence obscures the reality of actual guilt. From the dissonance between Andersch’s conformism during the Third Reich and his narrative

⁹⁸ For a critical reading of Andersch regarding precisely his emphasis on the generational break, cf. Weigel, “‘Generation’ als symbolische Form.”

⁹⁹ Andersch refers to Lessing’s play *Nathan der Weise* (1779), which includes the parable of the rings. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Trauerspiele. Nathan der Weise, Dramatische Fragmente, Anhang. Das dichterische Werk Bd. 2*, ed. Herbert G. Göpfert (Munich: dtv, 1979).

of resistance, it appears that he himself was incapable of self-criticism. Rather than self-criticism, he effectively prescribes denial. Furthermore, for Andersch to demand tolerance beyond what Lessing had in mind with the parable of the rings—at heart a call for tolerance of and among the Abrahamic religions—attests to his lack of reflection on the racial policies practiced by the Nazis. By calling Lessing’s ring parable a lesson “der allgemeinen Duldsamkeit gegenüber Ideen” (217) Andersch reduces Nazi anti-Semitism to mere intolerance of an idea, rather than recognizing it as genocide. Elsewhere in the essay, Andersch writes about Josef Goebbels: “Nicht ohne Grund hat der Meister [der offiziellen] Propaganda am Ende nur noch einen Feind gesehen und verfolgt: die deutschen Intellektuellen, gegen die sich sein unversöhnlicher Haß richtete” (200). This statement is truly astonishing in light of the Holocaust, and it draws Andersch’s inability to reflect self-critically in even starker relief.

In spite of an excursion into existentialist philosophy, which was reviewed as a radical move, Andersch’s emphases on the Allied occupation as colonialism, the denial of collective guilt, and the refusal even to mention the Shoah and to discuss Jewish authors, reflect a revisionist point of view. While stressing Sartre’s advice that the Germans overcome self-denial (and in Andersch’s interpretation Allied colonialism),¹⁰⁰ he is silent regarding Sartre’s demand for the Germans to foster “die Erinnerung an die Fehler der Vergangenheit” (218), which would include self-reflective engagement with anti-Semitism.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Andersch refers to Jean-Paul Sartre’s introduction to the German translation of *Les Mouches*, in which Sartre appeals to the Germans to replace their “willfähige Selbstverleumdung” with a commitment to freedom and the future. Qtd. in Andersch, “Notwendige Aussage,” 218.

¹⁰¹ In spite of Andersch’s admiration for Sartre, clearly expressed in the essay, Andersch does not mention Sartre’s 1945 text on anti-Semitism. Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Überlegungen zur Judenfrage* (Reinbek b. Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1994).

As both Klaus Briegleb and Stephan Braese convincingly argue, the nascent *Literaturbetrieb* afforded little room for Jewish authors or Jewish literary subjects, and it failed to account for the German-Jewish past before and during the Nazi regime. Briegleb concludes regarding the literary scene in the late 1940s: “Das junge Deutschland blieb bei sich selbst. Ein Anfang ohne Juden nach 1945.”¹⁰² Elsewhere he wrote of the entire postwar literature of West Germany, “[d]ass Juden in der deutschen Literatur nach 1945 ‘eigentlich nicht’ vorkommen.”¹⁰³ In his study of *Zero Hour* literature, Stephen Brockmann argues that this disinterest in Jewish authors and Jewish literary subjects should be interpreted as German resistance to perpetuating the attention given the so-called Jewish question by the Nazis. He calls this disinterest a passive response to racial obsessions and argues that Briegleb, who “is entirely correct in stating that for the most part ‘the *German-Jewish difference after the Shoah* was not thematized’ by postwar German writers,” is referring to a difference that emerged as a construct only much later.¹⁰⁴ Here Brockmann seems to suggest that in order to show that they rejected the Nazi past, the German people avoided the literary treatment of Jewish victims and ignored Jewish writers as contributors to postwar literature out of a desire to distance themselves from their own history of racial discrimination. But given that the Nazis had murdered the vast majority of German Jews or forced them into emigration, it is surprising that Brockmann would assume that any lack of concern for Jews in postwar Germany might be indicative of a rejection of previous racial policies. On the contrary, at the least this lack of concern reflects a continued indifference to the fate of the Jews. The Nazis posited German-Jewish difference as

¹⁰² Cf. Briegleb, “Neuanfang,” 58.

¹⁰³ Klaus Briegleb, “Negative Symbiose,” in *Gegenwartsliteratur seit 1968*, ed. Klaus Briegleb and Sigrid Weigel, *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur vom 16. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart* 12 (Munich: C. Hanser, 1992), 117-51, here 121.

¹⁰⁴ Brockmann, *Zero Hour*, 8f. Cf. “Die jüdisch-deutsche Differenz nach der Shoah wurde nicht thematisiert” (emphasis in the original), Briegleb, *Missachtung und Tabu*, 12.

the basis of their racial policies, and for this reason Jews became the primary targets of extermination. Brockmann's reading of the "German-Jewish difference after the Shoah" as a postwar construct is highly problematic, even if he is correct in pointing to the fact that many German Jews did not see such a stark German-Jewish difference until after the events of the 1930s and 1940s. Braese argues more convincingly that the experience of having survived genocidal policies equipped Jewish German writers with an entirely different perspective than that of non-Jewish authors, and thus the conditions under which they wrote in postwar Germany differed as well. Brockmann simplifies the role of Jewish voices in postwar German society by neatly distinguishing between two groups of Jews: those Jewish intellectuals who remained in or returned to Germany and who identified themselves as Germans and preferred not to discuss their Jewishness publicly; and those German Jews who identified themselves primarily as Jews and therefore chose to live outside Germany.¹⁰⁵ He concludes that the absence of Jewish voices was not a consequence of marginalization within the *Literaturbetrieb* but a matter of choice. Brockmann's line of argumentation raises an important question: is it true that Jews in postwar Germany did not problematize their specifically Jewish experience in the Third Reich and the role of that experience for the reconstruction of Germany? Regarding two specific Jews, Jean Améry and Wolfgang Hildesheimer, another question arises: why did German-speaking Jews who strongly identified as Jewish victims of Nazi racial policies decide not to live in postwar, democratic Germany?

"Mein Rang ist: Court-Interpreter." Wolfgang Hildesheimer

Wolfgang Hildesheimer returned to Germany from exile in London to work as simultaneous interpreter at the Nuremberg court during the Subsequent Trials. Just a

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Brockmann, *Zero Hour*, 9.

few days after his arrival in Nuremberg in January 1947 he wrote to his sister, who lived with their parents in Haifa:

In einem Occupations-land [sic] zu leben ist sehr merkwürdig und keineswegs leicht, aber davon werde ich in meinem nächsten Brief berichten. Vorläufig will ich von der Arbeit schreiben. Es ist mir übrigens schon gelungen Kontakte mit einigen Leuten herzustellen. Z. B. heute nachmittag bin ich bei Dr. Troche, dem Direktor des Germanischen Museums eingeladen.

Mein Rang ist: Court-interpreter (und zwar *von Deutsch ins Englische*) das bedeutet, dass ich bei Gerichtsverhandlungen alles was ich durch den Kopfhörer [auf] Deutsch höre sofort simultan, automatisch ins Englische übersetze und zwar in das Mikrophon. Du kannst Dir vorstellen, dass das eine etwas nervenzerreibende Tätigkeit ist aber auch sehr verantwortungsvoll, aber dafür haben wir eine sehr “privileged position,” einen sehr hohen Rang und verhältnismäßig kurze Arbeitszeiten. (...) Meine Schreibmaschinistin ist eine Nürnberger Deutsche. Sigi Ramler habe ich kennengelernt. Er ist eine Art Chef von mir. Er ist sehr jung und macht einen entzückenden Eindruck.

Nächstes Wochenende fahre ich nach München und Mitte Februar auf 3 Tage nach Garmisch.¹⁰⁶

In February, while Hildesheimer was still training to be an interpreter by sitting in on other trials and translating older material, he wrote to his parents:

Das Material was man in die Hand bekommt und auch die Zeugenaussagen die man bei den Ärzte-prozessen zu hören bekommt übersteigt manchmal alles vorstellbare. Während ich früher Skrupel hatte und nicht sicher war ob ich an der ganzen Nürnberg-maschine teilnehmen wollte, bin ich jetzt ganz sicher, dass alle Urteile die bis jetzt gefällt sind und auch gefällt werden, berechtigt sind.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Hildesheimer, letter to Eva Teltsch, January 1947, in Wolfgang Hildesheimer, *Briefe*, eds. Silvia Hildesheimer and Dietmar Pleyer (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1999), 15f. Hildesheimer's spelling and punctuation stand uncorrected.

The *Briefe* collection includes only a fraction of the letters kept at the archive of the Berlin Akademie der Künste. Volker Jehle is in the process of preparing an edition that includes all surviving letters between Wolfgang Hildesheimer, his sister Eva Teltsch, and their parents. I cite excerpts published elsewhere (e.g., in Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*) because the archival material was copyrighted during my visits to the archive in spring 2008.

¹⁰⁷ February 5, 1947, qtd. in Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 68f.

After he began interpreting at court in March, he added: “[Meine Arbeit] ist sehr interessant, lässt sich aber doch schlecht beschreiben, weil man schon bei diesen Prozessen dabei sein muss, um sich über die wirkliche Bedeutung klar zu werden.”¹⁰⁸ In April Hildesheimer reported about his “Debut” at the trial against Friedrich Flick et al., telling his family, in parentheses: “(Das einzige, was ich den ganzen Tag zu sagen hatte, war zwar nur: I am not guilty (sechs mal)).”¹⁰⁹ During the following months, Hildesheimer interpreted at the trials of the Doctors, IG Farben, the Hostages, and the *Einsatzgruppen*. He reported home:

Bei den Einsatztruppen geht es hoch her und das dolmetschen, obwohl ziemlich anstrengend, ist sehr interessant, da man unwillkürlich die Angeklagten nachmacht. Ich beherrsche schon das ganze Register von Ironie über Wut zu Tränen; man spielt unwillkürlich Theater. Die Angeklagten sind meist kleinbürgerliche Verbrecher und daher nicht so interessant wie zum Beispiel die Angeklagten der I.G. die eine rege Korrespondenz über alle möglichen Fragen mit uns führen. Auch schreiben wir uns gegenseitig Gedichte. Das kann man sich wahrscheinlich nicht vorstellen, wenn man nicht selbst dabei ist.¹¹⁰

These few snippets do not represent Hildesheimer’s correspondence with his family in general; although he wrote very frequently and repeatedly promised to report in greater detail about his work, he rarely made more than passing mention of it. It is actually quite surprising how little he reflected on his work and on what he heard in court, and how little he said about his interactions with the Germans themselves. In his letters to his family, Hildesheimer mentioned more often the comfort of his living quarters (“Riesenzimmer mit Badezimmern”¹¹¹), the rations of food, liquor, and cigarettes (far exceeding those available to the Germans and of much better quality), new friendships he had made with Americans, and his progress in the visual arts.

¹⁰⁸ March 3, 1947, qtd. in *ibid.*, 69.

¹⁰⁹ April 26, 1947, qtd. in *ibid.*, 69.

¹¹⁰ October 25, 1947, qtd. in *ibid.*, 69.

¹¹¹ Hildesheimer, letter to Teltsch, January 1947, in: Hildesheimer, *Briefe*, 15.

There is no word in his surviving letters as to why Hildesheimer returned to Germany as an interpreter.

Wolfgang Hildesheimer was born in Hamburg in 1916 to Dr. Arnold and Hanna Hildesheimer.¹¹² Although his parents were secular, his family had Orthodox Jewish roots.¹¹³ Arnold Hildesheimer, a chemist at the Anglo-Dutch cooperation Unilever, was, unlike his forefathers, an “areligiöser Zionist und ging nur noch an höchsten Feiertagen zur Synagoge als eine Art Pflichtübung.”¹¹⁴ The parents of Hanna Hildesheimer, nee Goldschmidt, had been booksellers in Hamburg and considered themselves “zwar vage jüdisch, ging[en] aber niemals zum Gottendienst, das tradierte Kulturgut war deutsch, war Literatur, vor allem Schiller.”¹¹⁵ Because of Arnold Hildesheimer’s employment the family moved frequently, so that Wolfgang Hildesheimer grew up in Berlin, Cleve, Nijmegen, and Mannheim. From 1930 to 1933 he attended the humanist boarding school Odenwaldschule, where he acted in Shakespeare productions and subsequently developed an interest in stage design.¹¹⁶

After several years of planning the family moved to Palestine in 1933. In preparation for a career in stage design, Hildesheimer completed a carpenter’s apprenticeship in Jerusalem (1934-36). In the summer of 1937 he took design classes in Austria before enrolling at the London Central School of Arts in Crafts, where he

¹¹² Summary biographies of Hildesheimer are included in Franka Köpp and Sabine Wolf, *Wolfgang Hildesheimer 1916-1991*, Findbuch-Editionen (Berlin: Stiftung Archiv der Akademie der Künste, 2002), 18-22; Hildesheimer, *Briefe*, 384f.; Heinz Puknus, *Wolfgang Hildesheimer*, Autorenbücher (Munich: Beck, 1978), 156-158; Dierk Rodewald, ed. *Über Wolfgang Hildesheimer* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1971), 165. (The biography included in Rodewald was compiled by Hildesheimer himself.)

¹¹³ His paternal great-grandfather, Esriel, had been a prominent modernizer of Orthodox Judaism and the intellectual leader of the community Adass Jisroel in Berlin. The grandfather, Hirsch Hildesheimer, had started a career as professor of history at a rabbinical seminary and then became, like Esriel, an editor at the Berlin publication *Jüdische Presse*. Cf. Henry A. Lea, *Wolfgang Hildesheimers Weg als Jude und Deutscher* (Stuttgart: Hans-Dieter Heinz, 1997), 6f.

¹¹⁴ Wolfgang Hildesheimer, “Mein Judentum (1978),” in *Wolfgang Hildesheimer Gesammelte Werke in sieben Bänden. Bd. VII, Vermischte Schriften*, ed. Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig and Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 159-69, here 161.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Köpp and Wolf, *Wolfgang Hildesheimer*, 18.

took up painting, textile, and stage design. While still in school, he began working for the Tavistoc Little Theatre, designing stage and costumes for Chekhov, Shaw, and Büchner productions.¹¹⁷ At the outbreak of World War II Hildesheimer was traveling around continental Europe, and he fled from Bretagne to Switzerland, where he had to wait several months before returning to Palestine.¹¹⁸ Once in Tel Aviv he worked as an English teacher for the British Council; in 1943 he joined the Public Information Office of the British Mandate government in Jerusalem to publish the weekly journal *Forum*. There he began writing poetry and literary criticism, in addition to advancing his career as graphic designer; he first exhibited his work in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv (in 1945).¹¹⁹

In 1946 Hildesheimer returned to London to work as a freelance designer and painter. After meeting the chief interpreter of the Nuremberg court, who was in London to hire interpreters for the Subsequent Trials, Hildesheimer took the interpretation test, which consisted of simultaneous interpretation from German into English of one of Hitler's speeches. He was offered a position and moved to Nuremberg, where he worked as a simultaneous court interpreter and (from 1948 to 1949) as editor of the trial protocols in preparation of their publication.

In a letter to Heinrich Böll in 1953 Hildesheimer explained his decision to return to Germany; he knew that Böll was in the process of preparing a radio broadcast on him and would use the information provided in the letter:

¹¹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 18.

¹¹⁸ Many letters from Hildesheimer to his family survived and are now part of the Wolfgang Hildesheimer Archiv (WHA) in Berlin. While Hildesheimer had not been concerned about the situation of Jews in Germany as reported to him during his studies in London, did not identify as Jewish, and paid in general very little attention to politics—even displayed pride in his ignorance of politics, which would only hinder his creative output and interfere with his romantic pursuits—he was terrified to be trapped in France when the war broke out. His initial impulse after recovering from the shock and overcoming his fear for his life was to join the armed forces against Nazi Germany. Cf. WHA 456 (128 letters by Wolfgang Hildesheimer to his family, 1947-1954).

¹¹⁹ Cf. Köpp and Wolf, *Wolfgang Hildesheimer*, 19.

Aus Interesse an dem mir damals völlig unverständlichen Simultandolmetersystem machte ich eines Tages in der amerikanischen Botschaft eine Dolmetscherprüfung und wurde als Dolmetscher zu den Nürnberger Gerichten engagiert. Ich nahm dieses Angebot an, da ich mich von der damals vielzitierten Kollektivschuld überzeugen wollte, *nicht* aber, um endgültig nach Deutschland zurückzukehren. Diesen Entschluss fasste ich erst viel später, nämlich als ich mich überzeugt hatte, dass diese Kollektivschuld nicht existierte. (...) Ich habe während dieser Jahre viele anständige Menschen, Opportunisten und Verbrecher kennengelernt.¹²⁰

Hildesheimer cites his interest in simultaneous interpretation as his primary reason for taking the interpreting test, not any interest in the Nuremberg trials or in postwar Germany. Only after he was offered a post as interpreter in Nuremberg, he told Böll, did the issue of German collective guilt become relevant. According to the letter, he agreed to go to Germany to convince himself of the validity of the collective guilt thesis; he decided to stay in Germany after having concluded that there was no basis for the accusation.

At that time the Nuremberg court was the only place in the world where simultaneous interpretation was used. The technology had not been employed since its debut in 1927, and it became the worldwide standard for international meetings only after gaining recognition at the Nuremberg court.¹²¹ Hildesheimer was fascinated by the technology, which connected everybody present in the courtroom via microphones and headsets, providing simultaneous interpretation between multiple languages using electronic equipment similar to the telephone system.

¹²⁰ Hildesheimer, letter to Böll, September 7, 1953, in Hildesheimer, *Briefe*, 39.

¹²¹ IBM patented the technology in 1926 as Hushaphone Filene-Finlay System. IBM offered the Allies its products without charge, probably, as has been speculated by Cornelia Vismann, because IBM itself was implicated in Nazi crimes by having provided improved technology to process statistical data on race. Cornelia Vismann, "Sprachbrüche im Nürnberger Kriegsverbrecherprozeß," in *Rechenschaften. Juristischer und literarischer Diskurs in der Auseinandersetzung mit den NS-Massenverbrechen*, ed. Stephan Braese (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2004), 44-66, here 50. For the history of simultaneous interpretation, cf. Francesca Gaiba, *The Origins of Simultaneous Interpretation. The Nuremberg Trial*, (Ottawa: Ottawa University Press, 1998).

Because of simultaneous interpretation's novelty, there was no established protocol for testing interpreters; the general guidelines called for fluency in at least two languages and the mastery of a broad vocabulary relating to law, medicine, and current affairs.¹²² By the time Hildesheimer tested for employment in Nuremberg, experiences at the IMT had winnowed the pool of suitable applicants down to male interpreters in their thirties who passed exams on concentration and mental composure under pressure; academics who translated philosophers with ease but stumbled when interpreting descriptions of daily life in the camps were often excluded. The U.S. Office Chief of Counsel for War Crimes, which hired Hildesheimer, concluded that only five percent of those who interviewed for a post actually succeeded in interpreting at court.¹²³ Because the task of interpreting was so demanding, interpreters worked two shifts of 85 minutes on two out of three days and were present in court on the third day on a stand-by basis. The rewards included a generous monetary compensation, rations of goods otherwise not available, car service, professionally maintained living quarters, and dinner and entertainment at the Grand Hotel.¹²⁴

Hildesheimer was one of the most gifted interpreters at the Subsequent Trials, and he advanced to "leader des Interpreter-teams [sic]" during the *Einsatzgruppen* trial, the "größten Mordprozess der Geschichte."¹²⁵ He reported this to his parents in a letter that is otherwise filled with information regarding his travels to Italy and to childhood vacation spots in Austria, and talk about literature and art, which mentions the completion of an oil painting that he wanted to exhibit at a Munich gallery. Briefly

¹²² Cf. Gaiba, *Origins of Simultaneous Interpretation*, 46.

¹²³ Cf. *ibid.*, 47f.

¹²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 71, 122-26.

¹²⁵ Hildesheimer, letter to his parents, summer 1947, in Hildesheimer, *Briefe*, 17, 19. The second quotation is by Silvia Hildesheimer, who wrote the commentary to Wolfgang Hildesheimer's letters for the edition.

he reflected on his future employment possibilities, which included a position at UNESCO in Paris.

Throughout his employment in Nuremberg Hildesheimer constantly made plans on where to go next. He travelled quite a bit across postwar Germany in his official capacity as interpreter as well as at his leisure. He planned to marry an American co-worker, and, for a period of a year, actively pursued the documents necessary to emigrate to the United States. As Hildesheimer also sought to advance his career as an artist, he established connections with artists in the Munich area who lived at Lake Starnberg.¹²⁶ After completing his tenure in Nuremberg Hildesheimer moved to Ambach at Lake Starnberg and worked as a painter and graphic designer; in 1950 he began to write short prose pieces as well, selling them very successfully to German newspapers and journals. That same year he contributed to the ZEN 49 exhibition in Munich and accepted Hans Werner Richter's invitation to attend a meeting of Group 47 in Bad Dürkheim. His complicated relationship with his American girlfriend, who was still married, coupled with his success in Germany as artist and writer, kept Hildesheimer from seeking an American visa more diligently, and by the end of 1951 he dropped his emigration plans altogether.¹²⁷ The following year Richter witnessed Hildesheimer's marriage to Silvia Dillmann, mother of two teenage daughters, whom Hildesheimer had met in Ambach. The family lived in Munich from 1953 to 1957, when Wolfgang and Silvia Hildesheimer left Germany permanently, settling in the village of Poschiavo, Grisons, in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland. When asked

¹²⁶ Cf. Hildesheimer, letter to his parents, summer 1947, in *ibid.*, 18.

¹²⁷ Between 1948 and 1951 Hildesheimer and his parents frequently exchanged news on his emigration plans. Hildesheimer's parents repeatedly asked about the status of his U.S. visa application process, and he informed them about complications, some of which may be attributable to his lack of focus. Even before his relationship ended, Hildesheimer did not seem fully committed to his emigration plans to the US and suddenly talked about plans to move to Great Britain, and even his UNESCO/Paris plans came up again. Finally he received a German passport—in order to further his emigration plans, as he explained to his parents.

why he had moved, Hildesheimer often replied that his and his wife's health benefited from the Southern climate, but the unpublished 1963 article, "Weshalb ich nicht in der Bundesrepublik lebe," offers an altogether different explanation: Hildesheimer claimed that he left because of rising anti-Semitism in Germany.¹²⁸

In 1952 *Lieblose Legenden* appeared as a collection of Hildesheimer's previously published stories. Throughout the 1950s, the author gained visibility as member of the *Literaturbetrieb*. He was part of Group 47 and elected into PEN in 1955 and to the German Academy for Language and Poetry in Darmstadt in 1958. Until 1965 he worked almost exclusively as a writer producing novels, radio and stage plays, literary translations, and essays on literature and music presented as lectures or broadcasts. For some of these works Hildesheimer received prestigious literary prizes, most notably the Bremen Literature Prize and the Georg Büchner Prize for his 1965 novel *Tynset*. Having more or less abandoned the visual arts for fifteen years, he participated in an art exhibition in 1965, after which many exhibitions followed in short order. With an increase in visual production (collages, in particular), the slow process of Hildesheimer's withdrawal from literature set in. In 1971 he published *Zeiten in Cornwall* and thus ended a project that had engaged him since his visits to Cornwall in 1938 and 1946; finally, in 1973, he finished the novel *Masante*, on which he had worked for several years in tandem with the Cornwall text. With the exception of one radio play, Hildesheimer then turned to biography.¹²⁹ *Mozart* (1977) became his commercially most successful book. The fictional biography, *Marbot*, for which

¹²⁸ "Die vier Hauptgründe, weshalb ich nicht in der Bundesrepublik lebe," unpublished manuscript, WHA 190. I will return to this document in chapter III.

¹²⁹ In 1983, Hildesheimer furthermore published *Mitteilungen an Max über den Stand der Dinge und anderes*, which is, de facto, his last work of prose and grew out of a birthday greeting honoring Max Frisch. In 1987, *Nachlese* was published: a collection of aphorisms and very short prose pieces that Hildesheimer had collected over the years as writer but unable to use in his works. Both are included in *Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Gesammelte Werke. Bd I Erzählende Prosa*.

Hildesheimer received the Literary Prize of the Bavarian Academy of the Arts, followed in 1981.

In 1981 Wolfgang and Silvia Hildesheimer also became honorary citizens of Poschiavo, which entitled them to Swiss citizenship. They chose to become citizens of Switzerland and forfeited their German citizenship in the process. Though Hildesheimer was no longer a German citizen, the Federal Republic of Germany nonetheless awarded him the Great Cross of Merit in 1984, presented by federal president Richard von Weizsäcker. Hildesheimer died of heart failure in August 1991, just months before his collected works were published. He was buried at the Protestant cemetery in Poschiavo.

1963-1965: Frankfurt

“Die Staatsanwaltschaft in Frankfurt möge nunmehr Auschwitz aufklären.”¹³⁰ The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial

Today the consensus holds that the Auschwitz Trials were a watershed event in West German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, for what followed was a shift away from the political and juridical realms towards memory culture. The first important indication of this shift came in 1959, when, during the Ulm Trial against members of *Einsatztruppen*, the public discovered—and furiously protested—the circumstance that the *Bundestag*, by reversing the denazification of the civil service, had rehabilitated a policeman implicated in the murder of several thousand Jews.¹³¹ As large numbers of POWs returned to West Germany, victims of Nazi crimes recognized

¹³⁰ Fritz Bauer, "Zu den Naziverbrecher-Prozessen. Gespräch mit dem NDR," in *Fritz Bauer: Die Humanität der Rechtsordnung. Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Joachim Perels and Irmtrud Wojak (Frankfurt/M., New York: Campus, 1998), 101-18, here 104. The interview dates to 1963.

¹³¹ Article 131 was passed in 1951 and entitled circa 150,000 former civil servants in the Nazi regime who had been dishonorably discharged by the Allies to state pensions and reemployment. Cf. Herf, *Divided Memory*, 289. For the Ulm Trial, cf. Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, 144.

more perpetrators and pressed charges against them, increasing the number of trials against former Nazis in the 1950s.¹³² It was survivors who identified and brought charges in the case of the Ulm Trial, not the West German government. The federal *Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Verfolgung nationalsozialistischer Gewaltverbrechen* (Central Office) was founded in 1958 following public protests criticizing the government for rehabilitating Nazi criminals rather than prosecuting them on the state's initiative. According to Jeffrey Herf, this brought "the era of democratization based on silence and integration [of former Nazis]" to an end.¹³³

A former Auschwitz inmate, Adolf Rögner, wrote to the Stuttgart prosecutor's office in March 1958 regarding Wilhelm Boger, an Auschwitz commandant who had devised a torture instrument known as the "Boger swing." Rögner, who was serving a prison sentence for fraud, knew that Boger was still at large. Because the prosecutor's office did not consider Rögner trustworthy, it took no action until Hermann Langbein, head of the survivor organization International Auschwitz Committee, confirmed Rögner's charges in September and demanded the immediate arrest of Boger.¹³⁴ Boger was arrested in October 1958, which marked the beginning of a close collaboration between Langbein's IAC and the Central Office that resulted in several other arrests of former Auschwitz personnel.¹³⁵

Shortly after Boger's arrest, the Frankfurt prosecutor Fritz Bauer received material that the Auschwitz administration had collected and which documented the practice of shooting prisoners. An Auschwitz survivor had taken these documents as a

¹³² Cf. Rebecca Wittmann, *Beyond Justice. The Auschwitz Trial* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 30.

¹³³ Herf, *Divided Memory*, 296. For an important study on the public image of Jews in postwar Germany, especially in relationship to the process of democratization, cf. chapter 6 in Frank Stern, *Im Anfang war Auschwitz. Antisemitismus und Philosemitismus im deutschen Nachkrieg* (Gerlingen: Bleicher, 1991).

¹³⁴ Cf. Wittmann, *Beyond Justice*, 55f., 59.

¹³⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 62.

“souvenir” after his liberation in 1945 and, unaware of their significance for a criminal investigation, held on to them until 1959, when a friend of his in Wiesbaden, Hessen, sent them to the Hessian regional court in Frankfurt.¹³⁶

Fritz Bauer was a German Jew who escaped the Holocaust in Danish and Swedish exile after the Nazis had forced him to leave office as a judge in Stuttgart in 1933 and imprisoned him for several months in a concentration camp. Bauer returned to Germany in 1949 with a genuine desire to help build a strong democracy.¹³⁷ He established his reputation as relentless prosecutor of Nazi crimes during the Remer affair of 1950-51, in which he rehabilitated the planners of the assassination attempt at Hitler on July 20, 1944. Former *Wehrmacht* general Otto Ernst Remer had repeatedly called them traitors, but with Bauer’s intervention they were proclaimed resistance fighters.¹³⁸ When Bauer later received the material pertaining to the Auschwitz shootings, he passed them on to the Central Office. Anticipating that Langbein’s and Bauer’s evidence would build to a large case, the Central Office consulted with the Federal Court of Justice as to how to proceed. In agreement with the prosecutor’s offices in Stuttgart and Frankfurt, the *Bundesgerichtshof* decided to move the entire

¹³⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 63f. According to Irmtrud Wojak and Joachim Perels a journalist from the *Frankfurter Rundschau* delivered the documents to Bauer. According to Bauer, it was either a journalist (“Im Namen des Volkes”) or the survivor himself (“Zu den Naziverbrecher-Prozessen”) who gave him the documents. Joachim Perels and Irmtrud Wojak, “Einleitung der Herausgeber. Motive im Denken und Handeln Fritz Bauers,” in *Fritz Bauer: Die Humanität der Rechtsordnung. Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Joachim Perels and Irmtrud Wojak (Frankfurt/M., New York: Campus, 1998), 17; Fritz Bauer, “Im Namen des Volkes. Die strafrechtliche Bewältigung der Vergangenheit,” in *Fritz Bauer: Humanität der Rechtsordnung. Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Joachim Perels and Irmtrud Wojak (Frankfurt/M., New York: 1998), 81; Bauer, “Naziverbrecher-Prozessen,” 104.

¹³⁷ Cf. Perels and Wojak, “Motive im Denken,” 9.

¹³⁸ Contradictory descriptions of the events exist. According to Reichel, Bauer lost a civil law suit against Remer (on grounds of defamation), but nevertheless changed public opinion to favor the attempted assassination as resistance rather than treason. According to Wojak, however, Bauer won the trial, and Remer had to serve three months in prison. Cf. Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, 100-105; Irmtrud Wojak, “Im Labyrinth der Schuld. Fritz Bauer und die Aufarbeitung der NS-Verbrechen nach 1945,” in *Im Labyrinth der Schuld. Täter--Opfer--Ankläger (Jahrbuch 2003)*, ed. Irmtrud Wojak et al. (Frankfurt/M., New York: Campus, 2003), 26. Wojak’s description is based on a succinct summary of the trial by Rudolf Wassermann, “Zur juristischen Bewertung des 20. Juli 1944. Der Remer-Prozeß in Braunschweig als Markstein der Justizgeschichte,” *Recht und Politik* 20 (1984), 68-80.

so-called Auschwitz investigation to Frankfurt, where Fritz Bauer would lead all pretrial investigations and prepare for the main proceedings.¹³⁹

Immediately upon assuming prosecutorial jurisdiction over the Auschwitz investigation, Bauer's office sent requests to survivors all over the world to submit written testimony against Auschwitz personnel. During three years of pretrial investigations, the prosecutor's office interviewed more than 1,500 witnesses, 356 of whom would later testify in court, including 188 survivors from seventeen foreign countries.¹⁴⁰ Bauer also commissioned a number of historians, most notably members of the Munich Institute for the Study of Contemporary History, to write a report on how the Nazis planned the "Final Solution" and designed the extermination camp system, with particular focus on Auschwitz.¹⁴¹ By calling such a multitude of witnesses and including expert historical testimony, Bauer intended to confront the public with the first coherent history of Auschwitz; he wanted to put the entire camp system on trial.¹⁴²

These measures were also necessitated by the peculiarities of the West German criminal code. The Federal Republic had adopted the penal code of 1871, which used subjective theory (*subjektive Teilnehmerlehre*) to distinguish murder from manslaughter or aiding and abetting murder. Only if an offender acted with a personal interest in a murder (as opposed to a superior's interest), intentionally desired a lethal outcome (rather than acting negligently), and displayed a lust for killing arising from base motives (such as sadism or racial hatred), could the accused be convicted of

¹³⁹ Cf. Wittmann, *Beyond Justice*, 64.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Irmtrud Wojak, "'Die Mauer des Schweigens ist durchbrochen.' Der erste Frankfurter Auschwitz-Prozess 1963-1965," in *'Gerichtstag halten über uns selbst.' Geschichte und Wirkung des ersten Frankfurter Auschwitz-Prozesses (Jahrbuch 2001)*, ed. Irmtrud Wojak and Fritz-Bauer-Institut (Frankfurt/M., New York: Campus, 2001) 21-42, here 23.

¹⁴¹ The institute was founded in 1949 on German initiative to study the history of Nazi Germany. For a compelling history of the institute, cf. Nikolas Berg, *Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker. Erforschung und Erinnerung* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003).

¹⁴² Cf. Wittmann, *Beyond Justice*, 79, 96.

murder. In cases of trying “excess murderer” (*Exzessmörder*) the stipulation of cruelty applied only to individuals rather than a group of perpetrators.¹⁴³ Thus the prosecution needed detailed witness testimony to prove that excess murder had been committed cruelly according to the standards set forth by Auschwitz regulations, which were presented by historians. As Rebecca Wittmann observes, following the letter of the law meant abandoning Bauer’s ambition to indict the entire system as cruel, inhumane, and excessive, because the law, by accepting the legitimacy of camp regulations, restored some credibility to the camp system.¹⁴⁴

By regarding cases, in which the prosecution failed to prove excessive murder, as instances of *Beihilfe* (aiding and abetting murder) rather than *Täterschaft* (perpetration of murder), the penal code seriously limited the punitive possibility of a trial, “der die Vernichtung von etwa 2 Millionen Juden und anderen in Auschwitz betrifft und sicherlich der größte Prozeß der Bundesrepublik sein wird.”¹⁴⁵ In a pretrial interview Bauer voiced his (subjective) conviction that millions of Germans had subscribed to the Nazi *Weltanschauung* and had conspired with Hitler in the “Final Solution”; all of them were “Mittäter.”¹⁴⁶ He anticipated the defense strategy—that the camp SS had followed orders without a personal investment in the crime, under the threat of their own lives—and rebutted it immediately: *Befehlsnotstand* was not an issue here. None of the 20,000 SS documents examined since the Nuremberg trials showed that anyone who refused to participate in the slaughter of the Jews had been punished.¹⁴⁷ The defense would thus plead superior orders as they were *subjectively perceived*.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ Cf. *ibid.*, 44ff.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 96.

¹⁴⁵ Bauer, “Naziverbrecher-Prozessen,” 102.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 111.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 112.

In the interview and elsewhere, Bauer confronts Germans with an alternative to following orders: the right to resist (*Widerstandsrecht*). Interpreting the *Clausula Petri* (by which man has to obey God rather than men)¹⁴⁹ to mean that there is “ein(...) unverletzliche[r] und unveräußerliche[r] Bereich (...), den anzutasten dem Staat und dem Menschen verwehrt ist,” namely the realm of human rights (“Menschenrechte,” in the narrowest sense, the right to live),¹⁵⁰ Bauer called it not only a right but a duty (“man [ist] nicht nur berechtigt, sondern verpflichtet”) to refuse Nazi orders in violation of these rights.¹⁵¹ The Nuremberg laws in particular, in paving the road to the gas chambers, were unlawful in this sense,¹⁵² and any “Anpassung” to unlawful laws that violated the right to live was, “wie unsere Prozesse demonstrieren sollen, möglicherweise Mord, gemeiner Mord.”¹⁵³ Bauer’s intentions at the Auschwitz Trials were therefore twofold. He wanted to demonstrate the Germans’ more general complicity in the genocide of the Jews—a task made impossible by the restrictions imposed by the penal code. More importantly, he wanted to use the trial to teach the duty to resist: “Deswegen ist es das A und O dieser Prozesse zu sagen: Ihr hättet Nein sagen müssen.”¹⁵⁴ “*Worüber die NS-Prozesse aufklären, das ist das Recht, ja die Pflicht zum Nein gegenüber unmenschlichen Anordnungen. (...) Das ist die Moral der Geschichte, das ist der Beitrag der Prozesse zum politischen Bewusstsein.*”¹⁵⁵ These and other statements make clear that Bauer’s primary interest was not the judicial punishment of crimes whose quality and quantity foreclosed the possibility of

¹⁴⁹ Acts 5:29.

¹⁵⁰ Fritz Bauer, “Antinazistische Prozesse und politisches Bewußtsein. Dienen NS-Prozesse der politischen Aufklärung?,” in *Antisemitismus. Zur Pathologie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, ed. Hermann Huss and Andreas Schröder (Frankfurt/M.: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1965), 167-88, here 183f. Cf. Bauer, “Naziverbrecher-Prozessen,” 113.

¹⁵¹ Bauer, “Naziverbrecher-Prozessen,” 115.

¹⁵² Cf. Fritz Bauer, “Das Ende waren die Gaskammern (1960),” in *Fritz Bauer: Die Humanität der Rechtsordnung. Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Joachim Perels and Irmlud Wojak (Frankfurt/M., New York: Campus, 1998), 91-96.

¹⁵³ Bauer, “Antinazistische Prozess,” 183.

¹⁵⁴ Bauer, “Naziverbrecher-Prozessen,” 114.

¹⁵⁵ Emphasis in the original, Bauer, “Antinazistische Prozess,” 185.

adequate recompense. He hoped instead that the trial would have a lasting impact, which would extend beyond the judicial framework and enter the historical and political realm.¹⁵⁶ In short, he wanted to make a legal case for something akin to Jaspers' concept of political guilt, and to impress upon the German population a respect for human rights and an acknowledgement of collective liability.

The three hundred-page indictment presented by the court in the spring of 1963 included the historians' finding and charged twenty-four individuals with the murder of "Menschen in nicht genau bestimmbarer Zahl."¹⁵⁷ Twenty of the defendants were present when the trial began in December, with Chief Justice Hans Hofmeyer leading the jury court consisting of three professional judges and six jurists.¹⁵⁸ As Bauer predicted, the trial became the longest in West German history, lasting until August 1965 and attracting 20,000 visitors.¹⁵⁹ No official transcripts of the trial exist, but five hundred hours of testimony recorded on audiotape—intended to be destroyed after the verdict was pronounced—survived in Hofmeyer's basement.¹⁶⁰ The combination of survivor and expert testimony provided detailed description of Nazi *Judenpolitik* and Auschwitz. Survivors testified for the first time in Germany before a large public.¹⁶¹ The historians who testified, Martin Broszat among them, published their findings in *Anatomie des SS-Staates*, which became a cornerstone in German Holocaust historiography.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 170.

¹⁵⁷ Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, 160.

¹⁵⁸ For the order of legal proceedings in Germany, cf. ch. 1, Wittmann, *Beyond Justice*. During the interim proceedings of the court many witnesses were interviewed again and, when their testimony contradicted earlier statements, dismissed and replaced by others. This is why the pretrial investigations of the prosecutor's office continued well into the phase of the court's interim proceedings, which officially began in the summer of 1961. The number of witnesses and even defendants shifted constantly until the actual trial began.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Wojak, "Mauer des Schweigens," 23.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Wittmann, *Beyond Justice. The Auschwitz Trial*, 4.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Wojak, "Mauer des Schweigens," 26.

¹⁶² Cf. Hans Buchheim et al., eds., *Anatomie des SS-Staates*, 2 vols. (Freiburg i. B.: Olten, 1965).

Another novelty of the trial was the court's visit of Auschwitz in December 1964. Through skillful diplomacy, the lawyers Henry Ormond and Jan Sehn collaborated to secure an invitation from Poland and the cooperation of East Germany. The West German government's reluctant approval followed only after the danger of losing face abroad outweighed pressure from *Heimatvertriebene* not to acknowledge Poland officially.¹⁶³ In an extraordinary gesture, the Polish government granted visas to twenty-four members of the court, including interpreters, photographers, and author Peter Weiss, as well as several hundred journalists. Over the course of two-and-a-half days at the site of the former extermination camp, judges, defense lawyers, and prosecutors verified witness testimony by measuring distances and testing audibility and visibility.¹⁶⁴

In view of the overwhelming evidence presented by survivors, supported by historians, and examined by the court in Auschwitz itself, the mild sentencing of the perpetrators, delivered after a week of deliberation, was disappointing for many and, for Bauer, devastating. Yet he was aware that it was less the judges' lenience (as is claimed by much of the literature covering Nazi trials)¹⁶⁵ and more the limitations of the criminal code that determined that most perpetrators were sentenced for the crime of aiding and abetting rather than murder because "a certain degree of 'lack of will' could almost always be proved."¹⁶⁶ Fritz Bauer judged the verdict a judicial failure and an affront to the victims:

¹⁶³ Cf. Sybille Steinbacher, "'Protokoll vor der Schwarzen Wand.' Die Ortsbesichtigung des Frankfurter Schwurgerichts in Auschwitz," in *'Gerichtstag halten über uns selbst.' Geschichte und Wirkung des ersten Frankfurter Auschwitz-Prozesses (Jahrbuch 2001)*, ed. Irmtrud Wojak and Fritz-Bauer-Institut (Frankfurt/M., New York: Campus, 2001), 61-89.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 72ff.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Irmtrud Wojak, "Die Verschmelzung von Geschichte und Kriminologie. Historische Gutachten im ersten Frankfurter Auschwitz-Prozeß," in *Geschichte vor Gericht. Historiker, Richter und die Suche nach Gerechtigkeit*, eds. Norbert Frei et al. (Munich: Beck, 2000), 29-45, here 31.

¹⁶⁶ Wittmann, *Beyond Justice*, 47.

Die Gerichte machten den Versuch, das totale Geschehen, z. B. den Massenmord an Millionen in den Vernichtungslagern, in Episoden aufzulösen, etwa in die Ermordung von A durch X, von B durch Y oder von C durch Z. Dem einzelnen Angeklagten wünschte man sein individuelles Tun im Detail nachzuweisen. Dergleichen vergewaltigt aber das Geschehen, das nicht eine Summe von Einzelereignissen war. (...) Der Auschwitzprozess war gewiss der bisher längste aller deutschen Schwurgerichtsprozesse, in Wirklichkeit hätte er einer der kürzesten sein können, womit freilich nicht gesagt sein soll, dass dies aus sozialpädagogischen Gründen auch wünschenswert gewesen wäre. Die Sach- und Rechtslage war ungewöhnlich einfach: Es gab einen Befehl zur Liquidierung der Juden in dem von den Nazis beherrschten Europa; Mordwerkzeuge waren Auschwitz, Treblinka, usw. Wer an dieser Mordmaschine hantierte, wurde der Mitwirkung am Morde schuldig, was immer er tat, selbstverständlich vorausgesetzt, dass er das Ziel der Maschinerie kannte, was freilich für die, die in den Vernichtungslagern waren oder um sie wussten (...) außer jedem Zweifel steht. Wer einer Räuberbande (...) angehört, ist, woran kein Straffurist hierzulande zweifeln dürfte, des Mordes schuldig. (...) Von dieser hierzulande sonst ganz üblichen (...) Praxis wichen unsere NS-Prozesse vielfach ab, wahrscheinlich, um das kollektive Geschehen durch Atomierung und Parzellisierung der furchtbaren Dinge sozusagen zu privatisieren und damit zu entschärfen.

Die Strafen, die ausgesprochen wurden, lagen häufig an der Mindestgrenze des gesetzlich Zulässigen, was mitunter einer Verhöhnung der Opfer recht nahekam.¹⁶⁷

Hofmeyer was of a different opinion. Prior to proclaiming the sentence, he insisted before the two hundred journalists present throughout the proceedings that the trial, far from being a “Schauprozess,” was an ordinary trial. In defining the goals of the trial, Hofmeyer dismissed the idea of “Vergangenheit bewältigen [zu können]” completely.¹⁶⁸ The court’s sole concern was to determine the criminal guilt or innocence of the offenders, and Hofmeyer warned against misinterpreting the trial as a judgment of moral or political guilt, referring directly to Karl Jaspers’ differentiation among forms of guilt.¹⁶⁹ To defend this point, Hofmeyer argued that a summary trial

¹⁶⁷ Bauer, “Im Namen des Volkes,” 83f.

¹⁶⁸ Qtd. in Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, 175. Cf. Wittmann, *Beyond Justice*, 211.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Reichel, “Vergangenheitsbewältigung,” 160; Wittmann, *Beyond Justice*, 215.

in which all SS members who had worked at Auschwitz would have been convicted of murder would have not only violated the West German penal code but would have reproduced the Nazi practice of incrimination based on membership.¹⁷⁰

Because the trial was indeed an ordinary trial under a criminal code that did not prosecute collective complicity and therefore built its evidence on testimony regarding particularly cruel murders committed by monsters, it represented Nazi perpetrators as a handful of sadists while technically acquitting those who followed orders without satisfying the legal conditions by which murder was defined.

The press proliferated this representation.¹⁷¹ Wittmann concludes that the press coverage of the Auschwitz Trial resembled “almost a pornography of the Holocaust, that both sold papers and distanced the general public from the monsters on the stand whose actions were reported in graphic detail,” thereby hindering efforts at *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.¹⁷² Hannah Arendt, whose notion of the “banality of evil” had been widely discussed without, however, replacing the older notion of monstrous aberrations, wrote in the foreword of the English translation of *FAZ* journalist Bernd Naumann’s report on the Auschwitz Trial, that the trial had done nothing to change the public opinion of Germans about Nazi criminals.¹⁷³ Fritz Bauer lamented the poll results of 1965, reporting that 40 percent of the population took no notice of the Auschwitz Trial, while almost half of those who did follow the trial wanted the prosecution of Nazi criminals to end.¹⁷⁴ Bauer compared this statistic to one showing that most Germans “[t]rotz Auschwitz und Treblinka” still favored the death penalty (which the West German constitution had abolished).¹⁷⁵ He wondered why, if so many

¹⁷⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 213.

¹⁷¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 176.

¹⁷² *Ibid.* 176, cf. 6f.

¹⁷³ Cf. *ibid.*, 246f. Hannah Arendt, “Auschwitz on Trial,” in *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2003).

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Bauer, “Im Namen des Volkes,” 77f.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

people demanded capital punishment in the abstract, no one had ever demanded it for Holocaust criminals in particular.¹⁷⁶ In a country that considered human rights “Humanitätsduselei,” the paramount task of Bauer and a likeminded few was still to teach “Kritikbereitschaft, Vorurteilsfreiheit, Toleranz, Humanität.”¹⁷⁷

Although the verdict disappointed Bauer, the trial succeeded in confronting much of the German populace with historical documentation and survivor testimony on Auschwitz. The media coverage of the trial thrust it from the purely judicial realm into a larger cultural sphere. Among intellectuals and feuilleton readers, discussion of the verdict became a debate over the question as to whether a trial could aim to master the past, and this dialogue demonstrated the trial’s public impact.¹⁷⁸

“*Subjektivität diktiert.*”¹⁷⁹ *Literary Responses to the Auschwitz Trial*

A few months after the trial ended, Fritz Bauer made the following appeal:

Es müsste eine Arbeitsteilung geben (...) zwischen dem Auschwitz-Richter und dem Auschwitz-Dichter. (...) [I]ch als Jurist sage Ihnen, wir Juristen in Frankfurt haben erschreckt gerufen, mit ganzer Seele gerufen nach dem Dichter, der das ausspricht, was dem Prozess auszusprechen nicht im Stande ist.¹⁸⁰

His appeal was to German writers—and not Auschwitz survivors—to articulate the Auschwitz experience to the German public. The circumstances explain this, for he made his appeal at the opening night of Peter Weiss’s *Die Ermittlung* in Stuttgart. Weiss and Bauer had worked closely together for many months: Weiss observed the trial during several visits in 1964 and accompanied the court on its visit of Auschwitz

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Bauer, “Antinazistische Prozess,” 174.

¹⁷⁷ Bauer, “Im Namen des Volkes,” 88, 90.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Wittmann, *Beyond Justice*, 247f., 253.

¹⁷⁹ Horst Krüger, “Nachwort. Zehn Jahre später,” in *Das zerbrochene Haus. Eine Jugend in Deutschland* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1976), 219-28, here 226.

¹⁸⁰ Bauer et al., “Podiumsgespräch im Württembergischen Staatstheater,” 76.

in the course of preparing to write the play.¹⁸¹ Bauer, who served as legal advisor to Weiss's publisher Suhrkamp, followed the development of *Ermittlung* closely.¹⁸²

Weiss's play was the first literary response to the Auschwitz Trial, and though, as Bauer regretfully noted, it portrayed the trial rather than Auschwitz itself,¹⁸³ at least during a few months in the fall and winter of 1965 it succeeded in pushing Auschwitz to the fore of discussions within the literary establishment. *Die Ermittlung* received enormous media attention, comparable to the news coverage that followed the screening of the U.S. American TV series *Holocaust* (1979) and Stephen Spielberg's Hollywood production *Schindler's List* (1993).¹⁸⁴ According to Christoph Weiß, within the framework of political *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, *Die Ermittlung* signified a more serious turning point in the development of German literature than the Auschwitz Trial.¹⁸⁵ The subject of roughly 1,200 to 1,500 newspaper and journal articles during the 1965/66 season,¹⁸⁶ *Die Ermittlung* achieved an unmatched notoriety without, however, gaining the same level of popularity. In spite of having won the city of Hamburg's prestigious literary Lessing Prize just a few months before, Weiss, a German Jew who never returned from his Swedish exile and expressed a political affinity to Marxism, suddenly received both anti-Semitic and anti-Communist reviews of *Die Ermittlung*.¹⁸⁷ It is therefore misleading to interpret the media attention provoked by Weiss's play only in terms of the German public's interest in learning about Auschwitz.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Alfons Söllner, "Peter Weiss' *Die Ermittlung* in zeitgeschichtlicher Perspektive," in *Deutsche Nachkriegsliteratur und der Holocaust*, ed. Stephan Braese et al. (Frankfurt/M., New York: Campus, 1998), 14.

¹⁸² Cf. Wojak, "Im Labyrinth," 30f.

¹⁸³ Cf. Bauer et al., "Podiumsgespräch im Württembergischen Staatstheater," 74.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Christoph Weiß, "'...eine gesamtdeutsche Angelegenheit im äußersten Sinne...'" Zur Diskussion um Peter Weiss' *Ermittlung* im Jahre 1965," in *Deutsche Nachkriegsliteratur und der Holocaust*, ed. Stephan Braese et al. (Frankfurt/M., New York: Campus, 1998), 53.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 53.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. ibid, 59.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. ibid, 54, 64.

Fritz Bauer was not the only one who encouraged German writers to respond to the Auschwitz Trial. While the trial was still underway, the Polish-German Jewish literary critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki remarked on the great curiosity that “kein einziger prominenter deutscher Schriftsteller auch nur mit einem Wort [sich über diesen Prozess] geäußert hat.”¹⁸⁸ Reich-Ranicki had permanently settled in Germany in 1958 and noted that the German literary establishment understood literature as something that ought to please; if literature turned to atrocities in the past at all, audiences looked for those events that could be interpreted within a framework of national tragedy. Stalingrad, for instance, offered a story “vom deutschen Heldentum” (201). Auschwitz, on the other hand, was not “eine nationale Katastrophe” like Stalingrad. Summarized by Reich-Ranicki in two words, “deutscher Mord,” it had little to offer for German literature (201). This mode of “Kulturverständnis”¹⁸⁹ was part of what Reich-Ranicki considered “die bundesrepublikanische Misere” that manifested itself in the trial in Frankfurt: former Nazi murderers and contemporary West German citizens were indistinguishable.¹⁹⁰

Reich-Ranicki’s reflections on the Auschwitz Trial appeared as part of a literary review for *Die Zeit* in May 1964; the reviewed author was Horst Krüger, who had just published the essay “Im Labyrinth der Schuld.”¹⁹¹ Reich-Ranicki urged all readers—not only of *Die Zeit*, but in Germany in general, as Krüger spoke “[i]n einer

¹⁸⁸ Reich-Ranicki, “Angelegenheit,” 203. From now on page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

¹⁸⁹ Stephan Braese, “‘In einer deutschen Angelegenheit.’ Der Frankfurter Auschwitz-Prozess in der westdeutschen Nachkriegsliteratur,” in *“Gerichtstag halten über uns selbst.” Geschichte und Wirkung des ersten Frankfurter Auschwitz-Prozesses (Jahrbuch 2001)*, ed. Irmtrud Wojak and Fritz-Bauer-Institut (Frankfurt/M., New York: Campus, 2001), 217f.

¹⁹⁰ Reich-Ranicki, “Angelegenheit,” 202.

¹⁹¹ Originally published in the May issue of *Der Monat* (1964) the essay appeared, with small alterations, as the sixth part, “Gerichtstag,” of Horst Krüger’s autobiographical novel, *Das zerbrochene Haus. Eine Jugend in Deutschland*. (Munich: Rütten + Loening Verlag, 1966). Krüger most likely chose the first title in reference to a 1961 text by Fritz Bauer, “Im Labyrinth der Kriegsverbrecher-Prozesse,” in *Fritz Bauer: Die Humanität der Rechtsordnung. Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Joachim Perels and Irmtrud Wojak (Frankfurt/M., New York: Campus, 1998), 143-148.

deutschen Angelegenheit”—to read the text.¹⁹² Krüger had visited the Auschwitz Trial in February 1964; he stayed for four weeks and published his observations in the essay that three months later prompted Reich-Ranicki to wonder at the absence of German authors at the trial. (While Reich-Ranicki greatly admired Krüger’s essay—which was “kein einheitliches Prosastück” (201)—he did not consider Krüger a prominent writer.) Following the sudden recognition (“mir [fiel] plötzlich ein”) that no prominent writer had commented on the trial, Reich-Ranicki pondered on the authorial profession, and though he disagreed with Hans Erich Nossack that the writer was duty-bound to comment on current events, he insisted that a writer must react “in seinem Werk unmittelbar oder mittelbar auf die Zeit (...), in der er lebt” (203). He did not expect German authors to attend the Auschwitz Trial—although Krüger had done so and had shown that it was still (“noch”) possible to say something “unkonventionell und eindringlich” about Auschwitz—he wanted to know what German writers *could* write about “jene Vergangenheit, die sich angeblich aufarbeiten und bewältigen läßt”: “Ich bin jedoch, ich schäme mich dessen nicht, sehr neugierig. Ich möchte so gern lesen, was hierüber, ganz gewiss, ein Schriftsteller schreiben könnte” (ibid.). Reich-Ranicki insinuated that there was much left to be said (“ganz gewiss”) without specifying what precisely, but he implied that if writers were to react to the times in which they lived—their Nazi past and West German present—they might prove the possibility of coming to come to terms with the past. Without actual effort this was only guesswork (“angeblich”). Reich-Ranicki’s line of thought turns on a long dash in the text, shifting abruptly from abstractly questioning what writers could say about Auschwitz to a single concrete question addressed to both writers and his readers. “Was fühlen und denken eigentlich diejenigen, die damals kleine Kinder waren, wenn erzählt wird, wie ihre Eltern drei Millionen Menschen in Auschwitz ermordet haben?”

¹⁹² This is the title of Reich-Ranicki’s review essay. Cf. Reich-Ranicki, “Angelegenheit.”

He adds, “[k]einer ist verpflichtet, sich dieser Frage anzunehmen. Aber die deutsche Literatur unserer Zeit ist es” (204). One’s thoughts and feelings upon learning about one’s family’s murderous involvement in the genocide of the Jews is thus a pivotal question for postwar German literature, at least in the view of one Jewish literary critic who had lost both parents in the Holocaust. He ends his essay with a further question and an observation. He asks whether “deutsche(n) Schriftsteller (...) zu jenen [gehören], die zudecken oder zu jenen, die aufdecken?” (204). Reich-Ranicki here refers to Krüger’s distinction between those Frankfurt Germans who went about their business as if the Auschwitz Trial were not happening in their midst and those who attended it.¹⁹³ Reich-Ranicki then notes that the trial would continue for several more months—an opportunity for German writers willing to find out in which category they fell.

How did German writers respond to Reich-Ranicki’s pointed question? They largely ignored it. The only non-Jewish writer other than Krüger to observe the Auschwitz Trial and write about it was Martin Walser, whose text “Unser Auschwitz” first appeared in June 1965 and presented a stark contrast to Krüger’s.¹⁹⁴ Comparing “Unser Auschwitz” to Peter Weiss’s 1964 Auschwitz essay “Meine Ortschaft,” Stephan Braese first notices the use of possessive pronouns.¹⁹⁵ For Weiss the extermination camp symbolized the place for which he was destined and where he would have found certain death;¹⁹⁶ he anchored his essayistic persona in Auschwitz and reflected on the camp from a highly subjective viewpoint. By contrast, Walser

¹⁹³ Cf. Krüger, *Das zerbrochene Haus*, 285.

¹⁹⁴ Peter Weiss, Horst Krüger, and Martin Walser were the only German-speaking writers who went to the trial and wrote about it afterwards. Additionally Bernd Naumann, who was a *FAZ* correspondent and reported on every trial day, published his collected writings. Bernd Naumann, *Auschwitz. Bericht über die Strafsache gegen Mulka u.a. vor dem Schwurgericht Frankfurt* (Berlin: Philo, 2004). Walser’s essay was first published in *Kursbuch* 1, June 1965. Cf. Martin Walser, “Unser Auschwitz,” in *Deutsche Sorgen* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1997), 187-202.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Braese, “Frankfurter Auschwitz-Prozess,” 221f.

¹⁹⁶ Braese quotes Peter Weiss as designating Auschwitz as the “Ortschaft, für die ich bestimmt war und der ich entkam,” in *ibid.*, 222.

used “unser” and “wir” throughout the text, referring to a German collective that felt free of the accusation of “Kollektivschuld” and was little affected by the fact of Auschwitz and the trial: “Mit diesen Geschehnissen, das wissen wir gewiss, mit diesen Scheußlichkeiten haben wir nichts zu tun. (...) In diesem Prozess ist nicht von uns die Rede.”¹⁹⁷ Walser fails to differentiate within the German collective. His “wir” refers to an apparently homogeneous group without distinction between Nazi perpetrator and his victim.

As Braese notes, to differentiate would have meant to acknowledge guilt.¹⁹⁸ Opposed to Walser’s “us” were “die ‘Häftlinge’”—who are not part of the German collective, according to this logic, and whose difference Walser emphasizes with quotation marks (“Häftlinge”).¹⁹⁹ The Jewish survivors who testified at the trial struggled to recount their experiences in court; according to Walser’s account, they were frequently unable to finish their sentences or to look at the defendants (190). Walser dismissed their testimony as tales that tell of “mittelalterlich bunte (...) Quälereien” that distort the truth about Auschwitz (192), prevent reflection (195), and abet forgetting (194). Thus he concludes: “Auschwitz ohne diese ‘Farben’ ist das wirklichere Auschwitz. Selektion an der Rampe, Transport in die Kammern, Zyklon B, Verbrennungsöfen” (192f.). But even factual knowledge of Auschwitz would not affect “us”: “Für uns aber wird Auschwitz keine Folgen haben” (202). Opening the essay with the claim that the Auschwitz Trial was less a judicial proceeding than an attempt at moral and political enlightenment (187), Walser goes on to suggest the complete failure of this project. He asserts in a somewhat prideful tone that he was not affected, by either the trial or Auschwitz: “Ich verspüre meinen Anteil an Auschwitz

¹⁹⁷ Walser, “Unser Auschwitz,” 198, 188.

¹⁹⁸ Braese, “Frankfurter Auschwitz-Prozess,” 221.

¹⁹⁹ Walser, “Unser Auschwitz,” 190. From now on page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

nicht, das ist ganz sicher. Also dort, wo das Schamgefühl sich regen, wo Gewissen sich melden müsste, bin ich nicht betroffen" (198). Walser does not feel affected because the rhetoric of *Der Ruf*, which continued to be used by Group 47 members, convinced him that he belonged to an altogether different generation from those involved in Nazi cruelties: the notions of *tabula rasa* and zero hour shielded him from critical self-reflection.²⁰⁰

Braese compares Walser unfavorably to Weiss, concluding that what distinguished the authors was Weiss's determined commitment to subjectivity, which allowed him to examine his own participation in history. Expanding on Klaus Briegleb, who argues that an author is able to approximate the Nazi past poetically only when he is willing to update ("aktualisieren") his own experience in history,²⁰¹ Braese considers Weiss's "subjektgeschichtliche[n] Blick" vis-à-vis his past the paramount criterion for all literary production in the wake of the Auschwitz Trial. This was especially important for non-Jewish German writers, whose knowledge of the Jewish experience was necessarily mediated by others and depended on taking initiative to engage in the discourse. According to Braese, it was imperative for these writers to revisit the past and examine their own involvement.

Horst Krüger was a freelance writer and the producer of literary late-night radio show at *Südwestfunk*. He frequently hosted prominent intellectuals such as Theodor W. Adorno, Ernst Bloch, and Alexander Mitscherlich, who responded to Krüger's interest in psychoanalysis and the Nazi past.²⁰² In 1964 Krüger moved to

²⁰⁰ Cf. Weigel's argument regarding the symbolic generation, "'Generation' als symbolische Form."

²⁰¹ Klaus Briegleb, "Vergangenheit in der Gegenwart," in *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur. Bd. 12, Gegenwartsliteratur seit 1968*, ed. Klaus Briegleb and Sigrid Weigel (München: C. Hanser, 1992), 76. Cf. Klaus Briegleb, *Unmittelbar zur Epoche des NS-Faschismus. Arbeiten zur politischen Philologie, 1978-1988* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1989).

²⁰² Cf. Timothy Boyd, "Ein Erinnerungsgang durch *Das zerbrochene Haus* von Horst Krüger," in *"Gerichtstag halten über uns selbst." Geschichte und Wirkung des ersten Frankfurter Auschwitz-Prozesses (Jahrbuch 2001)*, ed. Irmtrud Wojak and Fritz-Bauer-Institut (Frankfurt/M., New York: Campus, 2001), 262.

Frankfurt—a city he chose because it had to offer a lot for “den kritisch engagierten Zeitgenossen”—where he met Fritz Bauer and accepted his invitation to attend the trial.²⁰³ As result of his month-long observation of the trial, Krüger embarked on a tour-de-force of self-analysis in order to examine “wie es wirklich war, das mit Hitler und den Deutschen.”²⁰⁴ As Braese notes, Krüger was one of the very few non-Jewish Germans to do so.²⁰⁵

At the trial Krüger wanted to “nur dasitzen und zuhören, zusehen und beobachten” with the goal of gaining a differentiated impression of perpetrators and victims, who were “Menschen wie du und ich” rather than “Standbilder des Schreckens oder des Leidens.”²⁰⁶ As he listened to the testimony of Auschwitz survivors, including their pauses and silences, he realized that their survival rested partly on their determination, “einmal davon Zeugnis abzulegen, was hier der Mensch dem Menschen antat” (251). Krüger, who had fought on the Eastern front and took orders like “Millionen anderer Deutsche[r] auch” (254), began to wonder how he personally would have responded to an order sending him on detail to Auschwitz. No longer just observing the trial, Krüger was now involved in it.

Krüger reflects on his own subject position and turns his “subjektgeschichtlichen Blick” (Braese) on his past: “Was hätte ich gemacht? Wäre ich wirklich ein Held gewesen?” (255) Searching for an answer, he is gripped by “Angst und Erschrecken” because he is unable to deny the possibility that he would have followed orders and worked at Auschwitz (257). The scenario lies in the past, but Krüger suddenly questions his present position, asserting that in this courtroom, no one could *not* question his or her own subject position: “Wo bin ich? Wo stehe ich? //

²⁰³ Krüger, “Nachwort. Zehn Jahre später,” 222.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 222, 228.

²⁰⁵ Braese, “Frankfurter Auschwitz-Prozess,” 228.

²⁰⁶ Krüger, *Das zerbrochene Haus*, 239. From now on page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

Ich bin als ein Fremder, ein deutscher Journalist gekommen und wollte nur Zuschauer sein, aber während ich jetzt wieder der Stimme [eines Verteidigers] folge, spüre ich, dass hier niemand Zuschauer bleiben kann” (257). Auschwitz constituted a “Labyrinth der Schuld,” where a myriad of shades of personal involvement existed between guilt and innocence.²⁰⁷

Unable to find any distinction in appearance between perpetrators and victims, Krüger realizes that the title of the 1946 German film *Die Mörder sind unter uns* holds true twenty years later (260). Krüger suddenly recognizes:

Und zum erstenmal begreife ich jetzt, warum es Juden gibt, die in diese zweite deutsche Republik, die doch wieder anständig und erträglich geworden ist, nicht zurückkommen. Angst, ganz private Angst: der Straßenbahnführer, der Schalterbeamte an der Post oder bei der Bahn, der Apotheker oder eben dieser tüchtige Krankenpfleger aus West-Berlin—natürlich, sie alle könnten es gewesen sein. Man weiß es wirklich nie, New York oder Tel Aviv sind da sicherer, und wer nur Tote in diesem Land zu betrauern hat, darf er nicht, muss er nicht diese kleine private Todesangst vor uns Deutschen haben? (269)

His seems a rhetorical question. He concludes that the only difference between the perpetrators and victims in his present is “die Psychologie der Erinnerung, der Mechanismus des Vergessens”: those who desperately want to forget are unable, and those who should remember have forgotten everything (270f.). Observing the perpetrators closely, Krüger sees evidence that Freud was mistaken to say that guilt can be repressed but never forgotten: none seem to have developed neuroses, as Freud would have predicted for those who repress their guilt (271). Free of guilty conscience, “Leute mit Zyklon-B-Erfahrung essen und schlafen und lieben in diesem Land wie alle anderen auch” (280).

Krüger does not focus his attention solely on defendants and witnesses. There is a third group in the courtroom, one to which he belongs: the visitors. Apart from a

²⁰⁷ This had been the original title of the essay.

large number of journalists, there were approximately 130 auditors who waited every morning in line to receive admission tickets. Many of the visitors were young, school children and college students, some were senior citizens, “denen man ansieht, dass sie hierher nicht aus Sensationslust kommen” (273). But where is Krüger’s own generation?

[D]ie mittlere Generation, die es doch wohl angeht, die dabei war. Aber die wollen davon nichts mehr wissen, die wissen ja alles, die kennen es, die müssen jetzt (...) arbeiten, verdienen, müssen das Wirtschaftswunder in Gang halten. (...) Ich weiß es nicht (...), ich weiß nur plötzlich, dass ich nun wirklich im Auschwitz-Prozess bin und dass es gut war, zu kommen. (274)

Unlike Walser, who, though slightly younger than Krüger, served as a *Flakhelfer* during the war and certainly belonged to the “middle generation,” Krüger did not go to the Auschwitz Trial without questioning his own involvement in the history of Auschwitz. Identification with the perpetrator—“Wie schuldig wärest du geworden?”—was unavoidable for him; it would have been unavoidable for any German author visiting the trial, he thought.²⁰⁸ Krüger drew three important, morally radical²⁰⁹ conclusions that would dominate much of his later literary work. He could not take moral superiority for granted, but rather he needed to accept the possibility that he might not have chosen to disobey an order if the Nazis had sent him to Auschwitz; former Nazi perpetrators were living *en masse* in contemporary Germany without fear of prosecution; and Jews were very likely to be suspicious, scared, and resentful to live in democratic West Germany. Ten years later, in an afterword to the new edition of *Das zerbrochene Haus*, Krüger explained that it was “zwanghaft die Frage nach der

²⁰⁸ He writes this in the afterword to the 1974 edition. Krüger, “Nachwort. Zehn Jahre später,” *Das zerbrochene Haus*, 222f.

²⁰⁹ Krüger’s book was reviewed positively for its “moralische Radikalität seines [=Krügers] Denkansatzes,” qtd. in *ibid.*, 223.

eigenen Vergangenheit” and the literary credo, “Subjektivität regiert,” which helped him reach these conclusions.²¹⁰

“Eben fand in Frankfurt der große Auschwitz-Prozess statt.”²¹¹ Jean Améry

In the introduction of *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* (1966), Jean Améry wrote: “Als im Jahre 1964 in Frankfurt der große Auschwitz-Prozess begann, schrieb ich den ersten Aufsatz im Zusammenhang mit meinen Erlebnissen im Dritten Reich, nach zwanzig Jahren Schweigen.”²¹² As will be shown elsewhere, Améry’s statement is not completely accurate, yet it is true that the essay collection was the author’s first thorough examination of his past. Encouraged by the media attention the Auschwitz Trial received, he intended his essays for a large West German audience.

Améry wrote (and recorded) each of the five essays for the radio, and they were broadcast immediately upon completion between 1964 and 1966. He published them individually in *Merkur* and collectively in a single volume in 1966 and, again, with a new introduction, in 1977. Reflecting on their genesis in the autobiographical essay “Meine deutsche Szene,” he concludes that his authorial “ich” emerged in proximity to the Auschwitz trial, and that with the publication of *Jenseits* he entered the German scene: “Daraus wurde ein Buch, ‘Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne’, und mit diesem trat ich auf die deutsche Szene.”²¹³ In the words of his biographer Irene Heidelberger-Leonard, with Améry’s publication of *Jenseits*, “[a] star is born.”²¹⁴

²¹⁰ Ibid., 223, 226.

²¹¹ Jean Améry, *Örtlichkeiten*, in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 2, Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne, Unmeisterliche Wanderjahre, Örtlichkeiten*, ed. Gerhard Scheit (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2002) 351-491, here 471.

²¹² Jean Améry, *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*, in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 2, Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne, Unmeisterliche Wanderjahre, Örtlichkeiten*, ed. Gerhard Scheit (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2002), 7-178.

²¹³ “Meine deutsche Szene” was first broadcasted in 1975 and, in 1980, published posthumously as part of *Örtlichkeiten*. Améry, *Örtlichkeiten*, 421, 471.

²¹⁴ Irene Heidelberger-Leonard, *Jean Améry. Revolte in der Resignation* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2004), 196.

Named Hans Maier (spelled variously; his birth record reads Chaim Maier), Jean Améry was born in 1912 into an assimilated Jewish family that had lived in the Austrian Vorarlberg, near the German border, since the seventeenth century.²¹⁵ He started school in Vienna, where he met his lifelong friend Ernst Mayer, but after his father—more a “Tiroler Kaiserjäger” than a “jüdische[r] Weise[r]”²¹⁶—died fighting for his fatherland, Améry and his mother, who had a few Jewish ancestors but identified as strictly Catholic, moved to the countryside where she ran an inn and raised her son as a Catholic. After finishing eight years of schooling without completing a degree, Améry returned to Vienna in 1926 and began an apprenticeship as a bookseller. From 1930 to 1938 he worked at the bookstore affiliated with the *Volkshochschule* in the Jewish neighborhood of Leopoldstadt. Under the mentorship of Leopold Langhammer, director, and Ernst Schönwiese, lecturer at the school and editor of the literary journal *das silberboot*, Améry audited classes in philosophy and literature and participated in discussion groups frequented by members of the Viennese intellectual elite, among them Moritz Schlick and Rudolf Carnap. The intellectual environment fostered Améry’s interest in literature, writing, and neo-positivist thought.

In 1928 Améry published a short story (now lost),²¹⁷ and in 1934 he and Ernst Mayer founded the literary publication *Die Brücke*. While he had admired the

²¹⁵ For his biography, cf. *ibid.* While Heidelberger-Leonard’s monograph is the authoritative biography on Améry, Friedrich Pfäfflin must be credited for pioneer work in the field. Pfäfflin curated the 1982 exhibition on Améry’s life and work at *Deutsches Literaturarchiv* in Marbach, which was occasioned by the archive’s purchase of the entire Améry estate. The exhibition was accompanied by a special issue of the archival journal: Friedrich Pfäfflin, ed. *Améry. Unterwegs nach Oudenaarde*, Marbacher Magazin (1982). Pfäfflin’s biography of Améry has been republished, Friedrich Pfäfflin, “Jean Améry. Daten zu einer Biographie,” in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 9, Materialien*, ed. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2008), 19–41.

²¹⁶ Améry, *Jenseits*, 150.

²¹⁷ Améry called it a “Schülergeschichte,” published in a Viennese journal no longer traceable. Cf. a 1978 interview, Jean Améry and Ingo Hermann, “Jean Améry im Gespräch mit Ingo Hermann,” in *Jean Améry Werke, Bd. 9. Materialien*, ed. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2008), 43–152, here 92.

Heimatliteratur particular to Austria—regionalist literature that idealized and nostalgically yearned for the rural home country as an alternative to modern city life—Améry emerged in the 1930s as a political revolutionary, fighting on the side of the socialists against the clerico-Austro-fascist regime during the February Uprising of 1934. From 1934 to 1936 Améry worked on the manuscript of a novel (*Die Schiffbrüchigen*) that he believed to be a “so großartiges Werk, das könne nur Thomas Mann überhaupt richtig würdigen.”²¹⁸ The unfinished novel was finally published in 2007, and according to Heidelberger-Leonard, *Die Schiffbrüchigen* is indeed a great piece of work that represents the “vollständige Auseinandersetzung mit [Amérys] Gegenwart.”²¹⁹

Améry repeatedly stated that he did not feel Jewish growing up. Rather, it was the 1935 Nuremberg Race Laws that made him Jewish, that is: he was Jewish according to Nazi definition. Though he had left the Jewish religious community officially in 1933, he rejoined in 1937 to ease the process of marrying his first wife, Regina Berger. Prompted by the 1938 so-called *Anschluss* of Austria into Greater Germany by the Nazi regime, Améry’s mother offered to protect her son from racial persecution. If he were to divorce his Jewish wife, his mother would testify to an extramarital relationship with an “Aryan” man who had fathered her son. She would then obtain papers for Améry that would allow him either to remain in Austria or to emigrate legally. Améry refused the offer. Instead he and his wife bought the services

²¹⁸ Ibid, 93.

²¹⁹ Heidelberger-Leonard, *Améry Revolte*, 47. Jean Améry, *Die Schiffbrüchigen*, in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 1, Die Schiffbrüchigen. Lefeu oder Der Abbruch*, ed. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2007), 7-286. In the novel, which reads like Améry’s fictionalized autobiography foretelling his future victimization, the protagonist (and Améry’s alter ego) Eugen Althager is a displaced city pauper longing for *Heimat*; he is suicidal, rejects his Jewishness, and is injured in a fist fight with fascists who dislocate his shoulder. Améry’s shoulder was dislocated in 1943 when he was tortured by the Gestapo, cf. his essay “Die Tortur,” *Jenseits*, 55-85.

of a German smuggler and were brought to Antwerp, where Améry met Erich Schmid (a Viennese acquaintance) and Maria Leitner (Améry's future second wife).

When Nazi Germany invaded Belgium in May of 1940, all Germans in Antwerp, including Améry and Schmid, were incarcerated and deported to Camp de St. Cyprien in France. (Améry's wife was able to go into hiding with the help of Leitner, who emigrated to the U.S.) Améry fled, but, after the German occupation of France and the release of German prisoners, he was arrested again, this time as a Jew and not a German, and sent to prison in Gurs, near the Spanish border, from which he escaped in June of 1941.²²⁰ With the help of a network of Jewish communities, Améry travelled to Brussels, where he reunited with his wife. There he joined the Austrian Front of Liberty, a political resistance group that produced leaflets urging German soldiers in Belgium to desert, and he edited the movement's journal, *Die Wahrheit*.

In July 1943 the Gestapo caught Améry with leaflets calling for "Tod den SS-Banditen und Gestapohenkern!"²²¹ They arrested him on political rather than racial grounds. He was sent to the Gestapo prison at Fort Breendonk. He remained there for several months and was tortured for information about the resistance movement. Once it became known that he was Jewish, he was sent to a transit camp in Mechelen, from which Belgian Jews were deported to the extermination camps in the East. In January 1944 Améry was shipped to Auschwitz on transport XXIII; upon arrival, 417 of 655 people on his train were immediately murdered.²²² Améry survived the selection at the ramp and was sent to work in Auschwitz-Monowitz, the number 172364 tattooed into

²²⁰ Hannah Arendt was in Gurs at the same time. She too had been arrested as a German and remained detained as Jew: "[H]aving been jailed because we were Germans, we were not freed because we were Jews." Hannah Arendt, "We Refugees," in *The Jew as Pariah. Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age*, ed. Ron H. Feldman (New York: Grove Press, 1978), 55-66, here 61. Qtd. in Nancy Wood, *Vectors of Memory. Legacies of Trauma in Postwar Europe* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 1999), 71.

²²¹ Améry, *Jenseits*, 60.

²²² Cf. Heidelberger-Leonard, *Améry Revolte*, 89.

his arm. From June 1944 he worked as a clerk at the *Buna Werke* factory, where he briefly met Primo Levi. The SS evacuated Auschwitz-Monowitz in January 1945, and Améry went first to Dora-Mittelbau and then to Bergen-Belsen in April, which was liberated by the British the same month. Améry arrived in Brussels in late April 1945, one of the 615 survivors of the 25,437 Jews who had been deported from Belgium.²²³ His wife, Regina, had died the previous year of heart failure.

Upon his return to Brussels, Améry immediately started writing again. In the long essay “Zur Psychologie des deutschen Volkes” that dated June 1945, but which he began in all likelihood at Auschwitz, Améry addressed the question of German guilt. He was confident that the German people—whom he differentiated into categories of the Nazi elite, the complicit majority of the population, and the small opposition—would be adequately punished and more importantly, would acknowledge responsibility. Améry, who believed that Allied policies and world opinion were on his side, optimistically spoke “sowohl von Bestrafung (...) als auch von Erziehung” in the process of the German people’s betterment.²²⁴

Améry wrote several other pieces during the first three years after his liberation, mainly literary texts with autobiographical details, which he never published. He continued working on *Die Schiffbrüchigen*; in his later drafts his protagonist Althager was now identified as prisoner with the number 172364 (Améry’s Auschwitz number), although it remained unstated where or why Althager had been imprisoned.²²⁵ In a film script, Améry exchanged the perspective of a Jewish

²²³ Ibid., 103.

²²⁴ Jean Améry, “Zur Psychologie des deutschen Volkes,” in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 2, Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne, Unmeisterliche Wanderjahre, Örtlichkeiten*, ed. Gerhard Scheit (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2002), 500-34, here 503. The essay foreshadowed Améry’s later texts (in *Jenseits*) in important ways, and I will return to it in my discussion of the “Ressentiments” essay in chapter IV.

²²⁵ Améry’s unpublished works are at *Deutsches Literaturarchiv* in Marbach am N., Germany. Access numbers are prefaced by the abbreviation DLA and included parenthetically. Jean Améry, “[Ohne Titel. Eugen-Althager-Komplex.] Nach 1945, 175 Bl.” (DLA 81.1349). In “Die Festung Derloven,” part of the “Eugen-Althager-Komplex,” Althager is tortured: Améry narrates his own Breendonk experience. However, Althager remains a political prisoner (rather than a Jewish inmate) and does not get deported

prisoner for that of the French war returnee and POW Pierre, who also carried the number 172364.²²⁶ Under the nom de plume Jean-Paul Mayster, Améry wrote *Die Eingemauerten*, a play in which he further developed the character Pierre; more important than the plot is Améry's obvious engagement with—and admiration for—Jean-Paul Sartre, whose *Huis Clos* loosely served as Améry's model. From 1945 onward, Sartre became Améry's most important intellectual influence.²²⁷ These early attempts at writing autobiographically within a narrative framework are precursors for Améry's later essay-novels, a hybrid form of writing he explored in order to work through autobiographical material (in essay form) in fictional settings.

In none of these early works did Améry address the uniqueness of Jewish victims, but postwar circumstances of soldiers returning home, displaced people, and food and housing shortages loomed large. In the earliest letter that survived after Améry's liberation, he wrote Maria Leitner:

Du wirst mir bitte ersparen, Dir die elende Odyssee meines Lebens in diesen Jahren zu erzählen. Ich war nicht als Jude, sondern politisch verhaftet gewesen wegen einer, übrigens unerheblichen, Aktivität für das "Free Austrian Movement." Jedenfalls genügte es, um mich auch alle Marterungen der Gestapoverhöre auskosten zu lassen, dann war ich in so einigen Konzentrationslagern gewesen. Zurückgeblieben ist ein Lungenleiden, und die Ärzte raten mir, in die Schweiz zu gehen, wozu ich allerdings weder das nötige Geld noch auch die Einreisebewilligung habe. Ich versuche, zu schreiben, komme aber, um die Wahrheit zu sagen, nicht erheblich vorwärts.²²⁸

to a concentration camp. "Die Festung Dorleven" is the only part of the unpublished "Eugen-Althager-Komplex" that is included in his collected works, Jean Améry, "Die Festung Derloven," in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 1, Die Schiffbrüchigen. Lefeu oder Der Abbruch*, ed. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2007), 582-608.

²²⁶ Jean Améry, *Die Selbstmörder*, 1946/47 (DLA 81.1222). Cf. Jean Améry, "[Ohne Titel. Filmskript] 1946/47, 96 pages" (DLA 81.1223).

²²⁷ Cf. Heidelberger-Leonard, *Améry Revolte*, 110.

²²⁸ Améry, letter to Maria Leitner (Maria Améry), 1945, in: Jean Améry, *Jean Améry Werke, Bd. 8. Briefe*, ed. Gerhard Scheit (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2007), 24f.

Améry downplayed his particular situation as a Jewish survivor of Auschwitz. Leitner, who had been a friend of Améry's late wife in Vienna, and whom Améry met in Antwerp as Leitner and her Jewish husband were leaving for the U.S., became Améry's closest friend. Ernst Mayer, who still lived in Vienna, tried to arrange for Améry's return to Austria; from his letters to Leitner it is obvious how ambivalent Améry felt about returning. He confessed homesickness but lamented Austria's economic situation; moreover, he identified with France more than Austria.²²⁹ In February 1946, he wrote Leitner:

Immer noch sitze ich hier und kann mich nicht zur Rückreise nach Wien entschließen, trotz wirklichem Heimweh und à la longue besseren Berufsaussichten in Österreich. Es ist eine Art Furcht, die mich zurückhält, nicht so sehr vor den schwierigen Lebensumständen als vielmehr vor möglichen anderen Enttäuschungen. Nach so langer Abwesenheit hat man fataler Weise schon ein wenig den Kontakt mit einem Volke und einer Kultur verloren. Was Thomas Mann in Bezug auf seine nicht durchgeführte Rückkehr schreibt, bleibt gültig, auch für uns Österreicher. Inzwischen habe ich mir hier eine Art Zwischenexistenz geschaffen.²³⁰

Over two-and-a-half years later Améry was still in Brussels. Despite Mayer's efforts to ease his transition and Leopold Langhammer's offer of employment, Améry could not decide, yet he steadfastly pursued the reinstatement of his Austrian citizenship. Once his Austrian passport was returned to him, and along with it the legal right to live in Austria, Améry dropped the issue of returning there permanently, though he visited his native country at least once a year, for the rest of his life.²³¹

²²⁹ "Aber die Nachrichten über das Leben in Österreich sind schlecht. Sehr schlecht. Les nouvelles sont horribles, wir *wir Franzosen* sagen. Es gibt nichts zu essen. Es gibt keine Strassenbahnen, kein Licht, kein Gas, keinen Kleiser, nichts als Dysenterie [sic], Hunger und Kälte." Emphasis mine. Améry, letter to Leitner, December 23, 1945, in Améry, *Briefe*, 30.

²³⁰ Améry, letter to Leitner, February 26, 1946, in *ibid.*, 31. See above for a discussion on Thomas Mann vis-à-vis his return to Germany.

²³¹ Cf. Heidelberger-Leonard, *Améry Revolte*, 127. In his letters to Ernst Mayer Améry reflects on the possibility of returning to Austria as late as in the 1970s.

Austria was not the only country he considered as an alternative to Belgium. In 1946, Social Democrat Heinz Kühn, the future minister-president of North Rhine-Westphalia, who had escaped from the Gestapo to Brussels and had met Améry there, offered his “comrade” a position in radio, most likely heading a literary program with Northwest German Broadcasting or writing for the Cologne newspaper of the Social Democrats, the *Rheinische Zeitung*. He also wanted Améry’s assistance educating young Social Democrats. It emerges from Heidelberger-Leonard’s reconstruction of a complicated letter exchange between several political emigrants in the process of returning to Germany that the Social Democratic movement began recruiting Améry in June of 1945, after Kühn circulated Améry’s “Zur Psychologie des deutschen Volkes.”²³² Améry had no interest in living in Germany, however. He considered London, Paris and Zurich, living in all three cities periodically between 1948 and 1950, but in the end remaining in Brussels.

Through an acquaintance Améry met Frank Dukas in 1948. Dukas, the owner of a Swiss press agency, was a Jewish autodidact like Améry. The two men bonded over their experiences, and the Dukas agency contracted him, managing almost all of Améry’s journalistic output until the 1960s. Encouraged by his journalistic success, Améry offered Leitner, with whom he had become romantically involved, to work for him as personal secretary. He hoped that with her help he could maintain his level of journalistic output of three articles per week while gradually shifting his emphasis towards literary writing.²³³ Leitner, who still lived in the U.S. and visited Europe on business trips, moved to Brussels only in 1955, after she had divorced her husband; Leitner and Améry were married in Vienna a few months later.

²³² Cf. *ibid.*, 130ff.

²³³ Améry, letter to Leitner, November 13, 1948, in: Améry, *Briefe*, 36.

The same year Améry signified the finality of his decision to stay in Brussels by translating Hans and forming an anagram of Mayer, thus “Frenchifying” his name to Jean Améry, the pseudonym he used from then on. He had first written for Dukas as a ghostwriter, then under different aliases for numerous Swiss newspapers, most frequently for the *St. Galler Tagblatt*, as well as international papers in Holland and England. By 1965, he had written over 15,000 pages and 5,000 articles,²³⁴ including the series “Portraits berühmter Zeitgenossen,” covering pop culture celebrities, classical musicians, artists, writers, politicians, and philosophers. The series was so popular that it resulted in the publication of three books: *Karrieren und Köpfe*, *Teenager Stars*, and *Im Banne des Jazz*. A biography of Gerhart Hauptmann and one on Winston Churchill followed. In 1961 Améry published his first uncommissioned book, *Geburt der Gegenwart* (translated into English in 1964 as *Preface to the Future*), in which he reflected on postwar cultural developments.

Beginning in 1960 Améry worked occasionally for the West German radio station *Süddeutscher Rundfunk* (SDR), contributing pieces on cultural developments in Belgium and France. In January of 1964, he made SDR an offer to write

ein rekonstruiertes Auschwitz-Tagebuch (...), und zwar *keinen* Dokumentarbericht, wie es deren ja schon viele gibt, sondern Reflexionen in Tagebuchform über fundamentale existentielle Probleme des KZ-Universums und namentlich die Reaktionen eines Intellektuellen. (...)

Da nun eben in Deutschland der Auschwitz-Prozess läuft, frage ich mich, ob Sie nicht in einer Sendung ausgewählte Stücke meiner Arbeit bringen möchten: Ich glaube nämlich, dass man in dieser sehr speziellen und auf den Intellektuellen hin ausgerichteten Weise noch nicht über das KZ berichtet hat.²³⁵

²³⁴ Jean Améry, "Nach fünftausend Zeitungsartikeln," in *Wie ich anfang... 24 Autoren berichten von ihren Anfängen*, ed. Hans Daiber (Düsseldorf: Claasen Verlag, 1979), 215-26.

²³⁵ Améry, letter to Karl Schwedhelm, January 18, 1964, in Améry, *Briefe*, 101.

The head of the SDR department “Radio-Essay,” Helmut Heißenbüttel, was interested, and he and Améry collaborated on the project that eventually led to the publication of *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*. The success of his essays, on radio and in print, was immense, in particular among the intellectual elite. Hans Paeschke, chief editor of *Merkur*, asked Améry to contribute regularly to the liberal journal; indeed, Améry wrote some sixty essays and reviews for *Merkur* between 1965 and his death in 1978. When the publishing house Klett (later Klett-Cotta) bought *Merkur*, its owner, Ernst Klett, and chief-editor, Hubert Arbogast, offered Améry a permanent contract, which he accepted. Améry published six more books under Klett, all of which he first read for radio: collected essays on aging and on suicide; two autobiographical essay collections; and two essayistic novels, *Lefeu oder Der Abbruch* and *Charles Bovary, Landarzt*. His essays earned Améry several important recognitions, including the literary prize of the Bavarian Academy of Arts (1972), the Cross of Merits, First Class (awarded by Federal President Gustav Heinemann, 1972), the honorary memberships of PEN and the Darmstadt Academy of Language and Composition (both 1976), the Vienna Prize for Journalism (1976), and the Lessing Prize of the City of Hamburg (1977); he refused an honorary doctoral degree from Austria.

After Améry attempted suicide in 1974, he ended his life in 1978 in the Austrian city of Salzburg. He is buried in Vienna.

CHAPTER II

“Denk ich an Deutschland in der Nacht”:¹ The Melancholy Discourse and Wolfgang Hildesheimer’s *Tynset*

Melancholia has been called a German disposition.² At the end of a long line of melancholic German artists and *hommes des lettres* that includes Albrecht Dürer, whose sixteenth-century *Melencholia* etchings figure in every humanist discussion of melancholia, we find an expatriate author, W. G. Sebald. The author’s melancholy style, manifest in all his prose and particularly pronounced in those works concerned with Holocaust remembrance, *The Emigrants* (1993) and *Austerlitz* (2001), has been lauded because of Sebald’s “responsible ownership” of the Holocaust.³ Sebald’s oeuvre has generated enormous international interest among literary critics and scholars, who are almost univocal in their praise of his example in engaging catastrophes of twentieth-century Europe and their expressions in memory, history, trauma, and experience. This focus on Sebald represents a trend that began in the late 1980s, in which melancholia is favorably conceptualized as a model for collective cultural memory.⁴ The next two chapters of this dissertation will show that Sebald’s melancholy style finds a predecessor in Hildesheimer’s “monogische[r] Prosa”

¹ Wolfgang Hildesheimer, qtd. in Hilde Domin, “Denk ich an Deutschland in der Nacht,” *Neue deutsche Hefte* 107, no. 12 (1965), 124-34, here 124.

² Cf. Joachim S. Hohmann, ed. *Melancholie. Ein deutsches Gefühl* (Trier: Ed. Trèves, 1989). Wolf Lepenies lists several counterexamples, in which melancholia is believed to be a French or English habitus, to show the dubiousness of such stereotyping. Wolf Lepenies, *Melancholie und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1969), 64f.

³ Arthur Williams, “‘Das korsakowsche Syndrom’: Remembrance and Responsibility in W.G. Sebald,” in *German Culture and the Uncomfortable Past. Representations of National Socialism in Contemporary Germanic Literature*, ed. Helmut Schmitz (Aldershot, Hants, UK; Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2001), 65-86, here 72.

⁴ Cf. Dieter Lenzen, “Melancholie, Fiktion und Historizität. Historiographische Optionen im Rahmen einer historischen Anthropologie,” in *Historische Anthropologie. Zum Problem der Humanwissenschaft heute oder Versuche einer Neubegründung*, ed. Gunter Gebauer et al. (Reinbek/Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1989), 13-48.

(*Tynset*, 1965, and *Masante*, 1973).⁵ More importantly, I examine this style's suitability for creative engagement with memories of traumatic events, and I address the question of whether melancholia can adequately model collective memory. I particularly ask whether it is suited to enabling socio-political action. A broad recent current among literary and cultural theorists is to redefine and valorize melancholia and to affirm its symptoms as creative, critical, and productive for society. By focusing on one particular participant in this trend, Jonathan Flatley,⁶ I summarize in this chapter how melancholic remembrance is argued to include a revolutionary kernel that ties melancholia to socio-political consciousness and action. In the process of idealizing melancholia, practices of working through have been stripped of their critical dimensions and are interpreted in reduced terms. In considering Hildesheimer I hope to show that his melancholy works ought not to be separated from works of mourning and processes of working through. While in Hildesheimer's case one may make a historically specific argument defending his melancholic response on a personal level, I argue that to posit melancholia as socio-politically effective is inadequate. Hildesheimer, as chapter III will show, withdrew his narrator, the melancholic narrator of *Tynset* and *Masante*, and stopped writing fiction altogether. For Hildesheimer, as I read his works, the melancholy style produced only more

⁵ "Monologische Prosa" is the title of the volume in Hildesheimer's collected works that contains *Tynset* and *Masante*, cf. Wolfgang Hildesheimer, *Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Gesammelte Werke in sieben Bänden. Bd. II Monologische Prosa*, ed. Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig and Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991).

⁶ I deliberately choose Jonathan Flatley's 2008 work which, while not ground-breaking or authoritative, is representative of a trend whose more prominent proponents are Judith Butler and Ranjana Khanna. Flatley's introductory chapters (on the discourse of melancholia, with special emphasis on current exegeses of Sigmund Freud and Walter Benjamin) provide an overview of prevalent notions on melancholia in current theoretical writing. Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping. Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 2008). Cf. Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power. Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Ranjana Khanna, *Dark Continents. Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

melancholia and thus proved inadequate beyond a personal level for engaging with the past in a critical and creative manner.

Several aspects have been emphasized repeatedly within discussions of melancholia, which span more than two thousand years, and it is these elements that make melancholia both a suitable topic of literature and a likely disposition affecting writers: these are an inclination towards cognitive constituents of melancholia, memory and imagination; an affinity toward and preference for the past over the present and the future; and a preferred medium, the written word. According to the consensus in Hildesheimer scholarship, melancholia is a major, if not *the* “Grundzug im literarischen Werk Wolfgang Hildesheimers.”⁷ The perception of a “Mode Melancholie” among Hildesheimer scholars particularly applies to the reception of those works written in the 1960s and early 1970s that earned Hildesheimer prestige and a reputation as a serious West German author. This set includes the short prose fragment “Hamlet” (1961), the essayistic monologue *Vergebliche Aufzeichnungen* (1962), the play *Nachtstück* (1963), the radioplay *Monolog* (1964), the novels *Tynset*

⁷ Dietmar Goll-Bickmann, *Aspekte der Melancholie in der frühen und mittleren Prosa Wolfgang Hildesheimers* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 1989), back cover. The literature on Hildesheimer includes several monographs as well as a number of articles, but overall it is not very voluminous. The most important work is Stephan Braese’s study on Jewish writers in West Germany, which includes several chapters on Hildesheimer, cf. Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*. Braese also provides an encyclopedic entry to Hildesheimer, Stephan Braese, “Wolfgang Hildesheimer. Das Ende des Übersetzens,” in *Shoah in der deutschsprachigen Literatur*, ed. Norbert Otto Eke and Hartmut Steinecke (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2006), 237-43. Melancholia in Hildesheimer’s oeuvre is not only the topic in Goll-Bickmann’s study but also the focus of: Günter Blamberger, *Versuch über den deutschen Gegenwartsroman. Krisenbewußtsein und Neubegründung im Zeichen der Melancholie* (Stuttgart: Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1985).

Other monographs, focusing on history, temporal-spatial models, and the figure of the artist in Hildesheimer, are: Peter Hanenberg, *Geschichte im Werk Wolfgang Hildesheimers* (Frankfurt/M. et al.: Peter Lang, 1989); Wolfgang Hirsch, *Zwischen Wirklichkeit und erfundener Biographie. Zum Künstlerbild bei Wolfgang Hildesheimer* (Hamburg: Lit, 1997); Lena Christolova, “Die Zeit ist niemals in den Fugen gewesen.” *Raum-zeitliche Modelle in der poetischen Welt von Wolfgang Hildesheimer* (Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre-Verlag, 1999); Christine Chiadò Rana, *Das Weite suchen. Unterwegs in Wolfgang Hildesheimers Prosa*, *Literatura* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2003). Two comprehensive interpretations of Hildesheimer’s oeuvre are Puknus, *Wolfgang Hildesheimer*; Volker Jehle, *Wolfgang Hildesheimer. Werkgeschichte* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1990). For an excellent early introduction to Hildesheimer, cf. Thomas Koebner, “Wolfgang Hildesheimer,” in *Deutsche Literatur seit 1945 in Einzeldarstellungen*, ed. Dietrich Weber (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1970), 202-24.

(1965) and *Masante* (1973), and the autobiographical prose piece *Zeiten in Cornwall* (1971).⁸ These works coincide with a phase in which Hildesheimer's creative production underwent a process of radicalization and politicization, in which the thematization of the Nazi past, the inadequate processing of the past in the present, and victims' attempts at working through trauma come to the fore. Thus the discussion of *Tynset* (in chapter II) and *Masante* (chapter III) attends to the political implications of the author's melancholic work, in particular regarding Hildesheimer's approach to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.⁹

Before turning to Hildesheimer at approximately the midpoint of this chapter, I provide a preliminary summary of the historical discourse of melancholia and offer a reading of two canonical theorists of melancholia: Sigmund Freud and Walter

⁸ Goll-Bickmann, *Aspekte der Melancholie*, 1. Included in the *Tynset/Masante* complex are several shorter pieces that had been intended for inclusion in the novels but ultimately were published elsewhere. These include the last of Hildesheimer's *Lieblose Legenden*, "Schläferung" (1962), the prose piece "Die Margarinefabrik" (1965), the fragments "Der Ruf in die Wüste (1963) and "Cal Masante" (1969), and the radio plays *Maxine* (1969) and *Hauskauf* (1975). All the above have been republished in *Gesammelte Werke*.

⁹ Important contributions to scholarship focusing on *Tynset* and *Masante* include Wolfgang Rath, *Fremd im Fremden. Zur Scheidung von Ich und Welt im deutschen Gegenwartsroman* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1985), 79-161; Ernst Nef, "Die absurde Geschichte. Die Fälscher, die Häscher, der Melancholiker," *Schweizer Monatshefte* 51 (1975/76), 37-45; Uwe-K. Ketelsen, "Fremd unter fremden Namen. Erzählen in Wolfgang Hildesheimers *Masante*," in *Literatur und Geschichte. Festschrift für Wulf Koepke zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Karl Menges (Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998), 277-89; Jonathan J. Long, "Time and Narrative. Wolfgang Hildesheimer's *Tynset* und *Masante*," *German Life and Letters* 52, no. 4 (1999), 457-74; Jonathan J. Long, "Power, Desire, Performance. Narrative Exchanges in Wolfgang Hildesheimer's *Masante*," *Neophilologues* 85 (2001), 601-19; Mary Cosgrove, "Netzwerk und Erinnerung in Wolfgang Hildesheimers *Tynset*," in *Netzwerke. Eine Kulturtechnik der Moderne*, ed. Jürgen Barkhoff et al. (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau 2004), 251-59.

Hildesheimer commented on *Tynset* and *Masante* in a number of significant interviews. Cf. Wolfgang Hildesheimer and Dierk Rodewald, "Wolfgang Hildesheimer im Gespräch mit Dierk Rodewald," in *Über Wolfgang Hildesheimer*, ed. Dierk Rodewald (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1971), 141-64; Wolfgang Hildesheimer and Jens Walter, "(Interview)," in *Selbstanzeige. Schriftsteller im Gespräch*, ed. Werner Koch (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 1971), 89-99; Wolfgang Hildesheimer and Matthias Prangel, "Interview mit Wolfgang Hildesheimer," *Deutsche Bücher* 1 (1973), 1-10; Wolfgang Hildesheimer and Manfred Durzak, "Ich kann über nichts anderes schreiben als über ein potentielles Ich. Gespräch mit Wolfgang Hildesheimer," in *Gespräche über den Roman. Formbestimmungen und Analysen*, ed. Manfred Durzak (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1976), 271-95; Wolfgang Hildesheimer and Hanjo Kesting, "Das Ende der Fiktion. Gespräch mit Wolfgang Hildesheimer," in *Dichter ohne Vaterland. Gespräche und Aufsätze zur Literatur* (Berlin, Bonn: Dietz, 1982), 52-68; Wolfgang Hildesheimer and Hans Helmut Hillrichs, *Wolfgang Hildesheimer: Ich werde nun schweigen. Gespräch mit Hans Helmut Hillrichs*, ed. Ingo Hermann (Göttingen: Lamuv, 1993).

Benjamin. In recent years scholars have returned to Freud and Benjamin to explore various nexuses between melancholia and socio-political action in an attempt to rescue a utopian element from melancholia. Traditionally the discourse of melancholia, as shaped by Freud and Benjamin in relation to loss in the early twentieth century, considered melancholic texts to be those, in which a melancholic character views the world allegorically as a field of ruins in which past and present collapse into each other, but does not image a viable future. The individual introjects losses into his ego and practices endless melancholic remembrance; his “geschichtsphilosophische Verzweiflung gleitet in reflexiv-ästhetische Melancholie über.”¹⁰ In this model melancholic mourning for loss is unending and produces only more melancholia, but it is otherwise unproductive. In a more recent model of melancholia, advocated by Flatley and other scholars who have set different emphases within works by Freud and Benjamin, melancholia anticipates an idea of the future and prepares for it. Here melancholia becomes a productive, transformative state that gives way to a better future. This model posits melancholia as a privileged literary style for approaching the past. Before these two alternatives, which appear to be mutually exclusive, the melancholic novel today stands at a crossroads between static contemplation of the past and the productive imagination of the future, one prohibiting and the other encouraging socio-political agency. The present chapter and the next examine Hildesheimer’s position regarding the creative productivity of melancholia particularly vis-à-vis socio-political engagement.

¹⁰ Ludger Heidbrink, *Melancholie und Moderne. Zur Kritik der historischen Verzweiflung* (Munich: Fink, 1994), 164.

The Discourse of Melancholia

Melancholia, alternatively called melancholy,¹¹ has for centuries been a favorite topic and motif in literature and the fine arts, as attested to by a large number of studies on individual works.¹² Fewer studies attempt to grasp the concept more broadly.¹³ With a plethora of case studies and general descriptions of melancholia, the concept has become malleable, meaning substantively different things to different authors and their readers at different times. Wolf Lepenies, author of the influential

¹¹ The English equivalents for *Melancholie* are melancholy and melancholia, but recent critical literature tends to favor the term melancholia, perhaps because of the influence of Sigmund Freud's "Trauer und Melancholie," translated into English as "Mourning and Melancholia," cf. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. 14, A History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works (1914-1916)*, ed. James Strachy (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), 237-58. Melancholia is the preferred term in psychiatric and psychoanalytical discussions as well as for proponents of trauma theory. Although the valorization of melancholia as a source of social-political productivity (a trend I discuss later in this chapter) is a cultural phenomenon, this cultural phenomenon cannot be separated from the medicalized discourse of melancholia, and to emphasize the link between the two I use the term melancholia throughout the dissertation. This does not mean that I focus exclusively on interpretations of melancholia derived from medical assessments. On the contrary, I believe that the medicalized discourse of melancholia is itself a cultural phenomenon that interacts with other cultural phenomena.

¹² A few recent studies include: Rüdiger Görner, ed. *The Anatomist of Melancholy. Essays in Memory of W.G. Sebald* (Munich: Iudicium, 2003); Alexandra Stäheli, *Materie und Melancholie. Die Postmoderne zwischen Adorno, Lyotard und pictorial turn* (Vienna: Passagen, 2004); Angus Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy. Burton in Context* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Markus Scheffler, *Kunstthass im Grunde. Über Melancholie bei Arthur Schopenhauer und deren Verwendung in Thomas Bernhards Prosa* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2008).

¹³ Influential studies in the German context are in chronological order of their publication: Raymond Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy. Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion, and Art* (London: Nelson, 1964); Lepenies, *Melancholie*; Hans-Jürgen Schings, *Melancholie und Aufklärung. Melancholiker und ihre Kritiker in Erfahrungsseelenkunde und Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1977); Ludwig Völker, *Muse Melancholie--Therapeutikum Poesie. Studium zum Melancholie-Problem in der deutschen Lyrik von Hölty bis Benn* (Munich: Fink, 1978); Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly, *Melancholie und die melancholische Landschaft. Ein Beitrag zur Geistesgeschichte des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Bern: A. Francke, 1978); Franz Loquai, *Künstler und Melancholie in der Romantik* (Frankfurt/M.: P. Lang, 1984); Gert Mattenklott, *Melancholie in der Dramatik des Sturm und Drang* (Königstein/Ts.: Athenäum, 1985); Günter Blumberger, *Versuch Gegenwartsroman*; Roland Lambrecht, *Der Geist der Melancholie. Eine Herausforderung philosophischer Reflexion* (Munich: Fink, 1996); for a shorter version of the same text: Roland Lambrecht, *Melancholie. Vom Leiden an der Welt und den Schmerzen der Reflexion* (Reinbek/Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1994); Heidbrink, *Melancholie und Moderne*; Anette Schwarz, *Melancholie. Figuren und Orte einer Stimmung* (Vienna: Passagen-Verlag, 1996); Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Die Melancholie der Literatur. Diskursgeschichte und Textfiguration* (Stuttgart, Weimar: Metzler, 1997); Ludger Heidbrink, ed. *Entzauberte Zeit. Der melancholische Geist der Moderne* (Munich, Vienna: Carl Hanser, 1997); Peter Borchmeyer, ed. *Melancholie und Heiterkeit* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2007); Flatley, *Affective Mapping*.

monograph *Melancholie und Gesellschaft*, speaks of melancholia's aura, the attractiveness of which, he believes, stems from the concept's "Unbestimmtheit" and its "kaschierte[m] Sinn."¹⁴ In the German preface to what constitutes one of the standard works on melancholia, *Saturn und Melancholie*, Raymond Klibansky writes that the discourse on melancholia resembles the tower of Babel in which "ein jeder zu verstehen [glaubt], sei es auf seine eigene Weise, was gemeint ist."¹⁵ Despite the absence of a concrete definition, melancholia as an anthropological category remained relatively uniform until the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when melancholia became an object of interest within the emerging fields of psychiatry and psychoanalysis and began to be associated with depression.¹⁶ From the Hippocratic writings to today's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, general descriptions of the melancholic type or the depressive are surprisingly consistent. They include, in various formulations, mention of sadness, feelings of hopelessness, the inability to sustain enjoyment and interest, sleeplessness, tendency to suicide, and difficulties in communicating,¹⁷ all symptoms that appear spontaneous but often occur

¹⁴ Lepenies, *Melancholie*, 7.

¹⁵ Raymond Klibansky et al., *Saturn und Melancholie. Studien zur Geschichte der Naturphilosophie und Medizin, der Religion und der Kunst* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1998), 13.

¹⁶ For medical-historical overviews of melancholia and its psychiatric relative, depression, cf. Michael Schmidt-Degenhard, *Melancholie und Depression. Zur Problemgeschichte der depressiven Erkrankungen seit Beginn der 19. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1983); Stanley W. Jackson, *Melancholia and Depression. From Hippocratic Times to Modern Times* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1986). For a psychoanalytic (post-Freudian) reading of melancholia, cf. Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun. Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

¹⁷ Cf. Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 33ff. Flatley does not mention the difficulties of melancholics in articulating themselves, however, melancholic stuttering and melancholic silence are prevalent in the critical literature. Cf. Hellmut Flashar, *Melancholie und Melancholiker in den medizinischen Theorien der Antike* (Berlin: Gruyter, 1966), 46f.; Schings, *Melancholie und Aufklärung*, 281; Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Melancholie der Literatur*, 206. Freud notes the "aufdringliche(n) Mitteilbarkeit" of the melancholic but concludes that her talkativeness is a loud silence, Sigmund Freud, "Trauer und Melancholie," in *Gesammelte Werke. Bd. 10, Werke aus den Jahren 1913-1917* (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 1981), 428-46, here 433. Benjamin too notes the tendency of the melancholic "zur Sprachlosigkeit" and melancholia's silence. See Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin, Gesammelte Schriften. Bd. I.1, Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1980), 398.

in response to loss. The list of symptoms is the same in clinical assessments of depression and in cultural artifacts of (and on) melancholia. I am not interested here in the psychiatric evaluation of depression, but I do focus on melancholia as a cultural phenomenon. As such, it cannot be separated from medicalized discourses, including psychiatry and psychoanalysis. For this reason I frequently engage with other writers' interpretations of psychoanalysis and exegeses of Freud.

The Children of Saturn

Known since the *Corpus Hippocratum*, compiled between the fifth and the third centuries B.C.E., melancholia described the temperament caused by one of four humors that, when in equilibrium, signified a person's health.¹⁸ The classic teachings on the humors, viz. blood, yellow and black bile, and phlegm, speak to an ideal order; an excess of any of the humors threatened the universal order. For the individual, an imbalance among the humors either characterized one's general constitution or marked—if the humor was present in great excess—a pathological state. Black bile, the source of melancholia, was something of an exception to the system of humors, for the distinction between pathology and temperament was here much slighter than for the other humors. The state or illness of melancholia was exceptional in another regard: black bile was the only humor to cause symptoms of mental changes, including misanthropy, depression, and madness. This peculiarity helped the conception of melancholia shift into the later realm of psychology, and aided it the process of transforming the teachings of the four humors into a theory of mental

¹⁸ The teachings of the four humors and their corresponding temperaments and qualities result from the Pythagoreans' belief in four as the perfect number, and their attempt at finding simple primary elements, in this case four, to which the irrational structures of the world and life could be traced. Cf. Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, 3-10. For the earliest articulation of melancholia, cf. Hippocrates, "On the Nature of Man," in *Hippocrates IV* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 1-41.

types.¹⁹ In opposition to a widespread equation of melancholia and “all that was evil and nocturnal,”²⁰ Aristotle remarked with curiosity that all outstanding men, in the realms of the arts, poetry, philosophy, and statesmanship, were melancholics, and he proposed the new idea that their “remarkable gifts” stemmed not from “disease but from natural causes.”²¹ He admitted that too much black bile might cause a serious illness of the mind not unlike “epilepsy,” but claimed that it positively influenced the temperament at a moderate temperature towards more creativity, diplomacy, and geniality.²² Aristotle was the first to distinguish manic and depressive phases that accounted for the melancholic’s range of moods spanning cheerfulness to suicidal tendencies.²³ From his reading of Aristotle Günter Blamberger concludes that from the

¹⁹ Cf. Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, 14f.

²⁰ Ibid., 16.

²¹ Book III, Problem I, known as “A Monograph on Black Bile,” Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle. Vol. 2, Problems*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1502. Cf. “Why is it that all those who have become eminent in philosophy or politics or poetry or the arts are clearly of an atrabilious temperament [are clearly melancholics], and some of them to such an extent as to be affected by diseases caused by black bile, as is said to have happened to Heracles among the heroes? (...) There are also the stories of Ajax and Bellerophon, of whom the former became insane, while the latter sought out habitation in desert places (...). And many other of the heroes seem to have been similarly afflicted, and among men of recent times Empedocles, Plato, and Socrates, and numerous other well-known men, and also most of the poets.” Aristotle, *Problems*, 1498f. Text in square brackets refers to the translation provided in Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, 18f. Cf. Hildesheimer’s narrator in *Tynset and Masante*, who seeks the desert and disappears there.

²² Aristotle, *Problems*, III.1, 1499. Aristotle distinguishes between different degrees of melancholia, calling the effect of black bile “variable,” thereby producing a “variation” of melancholics (1502): “[T]hose who possess an atrabilious temperament in a slight degree are ordinary, but those who have much of it are quite unlike the majority of people. For, if their condition is quite complete, they are very atrabilious; but, if they possess a mixed temperament, they are men of genius” (1501). Attributing melancholia to an excess of heat or cold, causing either dullness and stupidity or “frenzy,” Aristotle writes of those melancholics who, while affected by an excess of black bile, maintain a balanced, consistent temperature of black bile, the following: “Those in whom the excessive heat dies down to a mean temperature are atrabilious, but they have more practical wisdom and are less eccentric and in many respects superior to others either in education or in the arts or in public life.” Even those melancholics suffering from hot black bile and who therefore are “frenzied” have access to geniality: The poet Maracus, Aristotle writes, “was actually a better poet when he was out of his mind.” Those, however, whose bile is cold “beyond due measure,” are suicidal (1501).

²³ “[W]ine and the atrabilious temperament are similar in nature” (1500). Wine and melancholia make men “irritable, benevolent, compassionate, or reckless.” A small amount of wine may turn a man talkative, while a large amount of wine may have the effect on him of seeking absolute silence. The quantity of black bile and its temperature affect men differently in a similar vein. “[O]ne man is loquacious, another emotional, another easily moved to tears. (...) Other become compassionate or savage or taciturn; for some maintain a complete silence, especially those atrabilious subjects who are out of their minds” (1499). Ibid.

melancholic's tightrope walk between mania and depression, she more than others comes to know the "Abgründe menschlichen Daseins." Knowing fully the dangers to human existence and continuing to live regardless—therein lies her accomplishment.²⁴

Although Aristotle's thoughts on the melancholia of great men were frequently quoted, it was not until the fifteenth century that the Renaissance established a firm link between melancholia and genius, especially artistic genius.²⁵ Until then, all that had survived of Aristotle's assessment of melancholia was the vague notion that a special connection existed between melancholia and intellectual life.²⁶ Melancholia was otherwise generally treated as a pathology. Moral theologians of the middle ages discussed it primarily in terms of blasphemy or affiliation with the devil.²⁷ Within the medieval Christian worldview, the melancholic was suspected of *acedia* (apathy, literally non-caring) and *tristitia* (despair), attitudes that were interpreted as a rejection of God or the failure to experience God's presence.²⁸

Concurrent with a theological interpretation of melancholia as sin, and perhaps as an expression of concern with church dogma, late medieval narrative poetry and prose made favorable use of the concept in depicting mental states. In this sense melancholia began increasingly to describe a temporary mood caused by external circumstances, such as a melancholic night or melancholic nature: melancholia was transferred from the individual who experienced it to a situation that was believed to

²⁴ Blamberger, *Versuch Gegenwartsroman*, 15.

²⁵ The connection between melancholia and creative productivity has been widely examined, most prominently in: Rudolf Wittkower and Margot Wittkower, *Born under Saturn. The Character and Conduct of Artists: A Documented History from Antiquity to the French Revolution* (New York Random House, 1963), 98-132. Cf. Ulrich Horstmann, "Die Kunst des Großen Umsonst. Melancholie als ästhetische Produktivkraft," in *Kunstgriffe. Auskünfte zur Reichweite von Literaturtheorie und Literaturkritik. Festschrift für Herbert Mainusch*, ed. Ulrich Horstmann and Wolfgang Zach (Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 1989), 127-38; Völker, *Muse Melancholie, Therapeutikum Poesie*.

²⁶ Cf. Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, 42. The authors discuss a few medieval scholars who were exceptions in that they attempted (unsuccessfully) to reintroduce Aristotle's thought on melancholia; cf. *Saturn and Melancholy*, 67-74.

²⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 75-82, 165-70.

²⁸ Cf. ch. 2, Lambrecht, *Leiden an der Welt*, 35-58; Michael Theunissen, *Vorentwürfe von Moderne. Antike Melancholie und die Acedia des Mittelalters* (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1996).

have caused the experience.²⁹ In the literature of the early modern period, melancholia was invoked to establish a positively inflected association with an ambiguous, bittersweet mood that described pleasurable pensiveness and lonesomeness, and by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries it had become synonymous with indefinite, painful yet pleasant *Weltschmerz*.³⁰

Independent of this reappraisal of melancholia from the pathological and sinful to the poetic, by which melancholia gradually gained credibility as a subjective, sentimental, and pleasurable mood, the notion of melancholia as an intellectual force leading to creative or contemplative productivity developed as part of both Italian humanism (in the person of Marsilio Ficino) and, following the Italian model, the northern Renaissance (e.g., Albrecht Dürer).³¹ It was through the writings of Ficino, the 1482/89 *Three Books on Life*, that the idea of “the melancholy man of genius,”³² in particular the artist-intellectual or *homo litteratus*,³³ found widespread acceptance. Ficino had fully embraced Aristotle’s thesis of melancholic great men and, in combination with Arabic teachings on the planet Saturn,³⁴ devised a system in which Saturn’s “immanent contradiction” was given “redemptive power”: “The melancholic should (...) apply himself of his own accord to that activity which is the particular

²⁹ Cf. Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, 217ff.

³⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 228-40. The poetic and philosophical aesthetic melancholia is related to *hypochondria*, the “weltschmerzliche Empfindlichkeit” of German Romanticism. Melancholia was an especially frequent theme and/or often invoked mood in German *Sturm und Drang* and Romanticism (ch. Goethe’s *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, 1774; Kant’s *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*, 1764; Novalis’ *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, 1802/19). Cf. ch. 3, Lambrecht, *Leiden an der Welt*, 59-92.

³¹ Cf. Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, 241ff.

³² *Ibid.*, 255. Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, trans. Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1998).

³³ Cf. Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Melancholie der Literatur*, 20.

³⁴ The discourse of melancholia absorbed Arabic teachings on melancholia once they had been translated into Latin in the eleventh century. As consequence, the planet Saturn (and its Greek name-giver, the internally divided Cronos) was firmly established in connection with melancholia and the melancholic disposition described as Saturnine. Saturn was believed to reside over a host of contradictory properties, including loneliness, sadness, writing, loss, and reflection. Cf. Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, 82ff., 127-35.

sublime star of speculation, and which the planet [=Saturn] promotes just as powerfully as it hinders and harms the ordinary functions of body and soul—that is to say, to creative contemplation.”³⁵ The children of Saturn—melancholics—were given to strong impulses of the imagination; according to Arabic teachings on Saturn, this capacity to imagine is associated with an inclination for mathematics and geometry. Panofsky and Saxl discerned from Dürer’s etching *Melencolia I*—“[dem] Bild der Bilder”³⁶ that translated Ficino’s melancholia into its most iconic image—that Dürer believed (as did others) that the imaginative disposition, linked to a talent for mathematics, came at a cost, in that it “renders the mind incapable of metaphysical speculation.” Absent metaphysical insight, melancholia meant an “intellectual limitation” that left its carrier with the “feeling of imprisonment within enclosing walls.”³⁷ In her study on melancholia in literature, Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf contrasts the melancholic’s sensibility for (spatial or mathematical) order with disorderly conduct vis-à-vis society, and she situates the Renaissance discourse of melancholia in a field of tension between order and disorder.³⁸ With the help of Dürer’s *Melencolia*, she theorizes that the melancholic geometrician projects geometric order onto a world that would otherwise be empty of meaning for him. Because he lacks “[den] höhere[n] Ein- und Überblick,” the melancholic compensates with a peculiar form of melancholic order.³⁹ With Ficino and Dürer the discourse of melancholia thus changed

³⁵ Ibid., 271.

³⁶ Cf. Peter-Klaus Schuster, "Das Bild der Bilder. Zur Wirkungsgeschichte von Dürers Melancholiekupferstich," *Idea. Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunsthalle* 1 (1982), 72-134.

³⁷ Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, 338.

³⁸ Cf. Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Melancholie der Literatur*, 202f.

³⁹ Cf. ibid., 198. Wagner-Egelhaaf finds evidence for her theory in the psychiatric literature of the twentieth century, in which the melancholic’s pathological obsession for order leads him to experience “überall nur Unordnung” (200). Long before Dürer, in the thirteenth century, Henricus de Gandavo stated that the melancholic’s thoughts “must have extension or, as the geometrical point, occupy a position in space. For this reason such people are melancholy, and are the best mathematicians, but the worst metaphysicians; for they cannot raise their minds above the spatial notions on which mathematics is based.” Henricus de Gandavo, *Quodlibeta*, trans. Roland J. Teske (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1993). Qtd. in: David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, "Mourning Remains," in *Loss. The Politics of*

not only to include a notion of heightened self-awareness and geniality, but also of alienation and indecision. All four traits are present in Shakespeare's Hamlet, often considered the quintessential melancholic literary character.

Wolf Lepenies, in his sociological study on eighteenth-century bourgeois melancholia, observed in absolutist Europe a curious connection that scholars established between melancholia, order, and utopia. Robert Burton in particular, in his 1612 *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, drafted a utopian plan that prescribed, in essence, the absence of melancholia (and therefore the absence of disorder).⁴⁰ In the eighteenth century the relationship between melancholia and order shifted, and it became an excess of order imposed by external forces that caused internal boredom, dissatisfaction, and melancholia.⁴¹ Lepenies in short discovered a dialectical and reciprocal relationship between melancholia and utopia qua order. Important here is his twofold argument that utopian thinking arises from the desire to banish melancholia, and that too much order provokes in turn rebellion in the form of melancholia.

Concurrent with the establishment in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of an autonomous cultural sphere separate from the political realm and driven by a growing reading public, which absorbed much of the discourse of melancholia, an entirely different, medicalized interest in depression emerged. Melancholia was no longer an umbrella term for all mental illnesses, but rather it became a differentiated disease in need of specific study, observation, and treatment. With the birth of psychiatry, literally the medical treatment of the mind, the discourse bifurcated. One of the canonical texts on melancholia is Sigmund Freud's essay "Mourning and

Mourning, ed. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2003), 1-25, here 18.

⁴⁰ Cf. the preface, "Democritus to the Reader," Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (London: Everyman's Library, 1932), 15-123. Cf. Lepenies, *Melancholie*, 22-30.

⁴¹ Cf. Lepenies, *Melancholie*, 46-78.

Melancholia.” Freud’s confrontation of mourning and melancholia is of such “formelhafter Einprägsamkeit,”⁴² that it has had an enormous influence on our contemporary discussion of melancholia, even (and especially) outside psychiatric frameworks as pertaining to questions of cultural significance. This holds particularly true in the present study of Hildesheimer, since the text “Mourning and Melancholia” is central to Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich’s seminal work on a German inability to mourn the losses of World War II.⁴³ Both the Mitscherlich’s and Freud’s texts thus play pivotal roles in the discussion of postwar German identity.

The Works of Mourning and Melancholia: Sigmund Freud

While melancholia has long been associated in modernity with loss and grief, earlier theories of melancholia have discussed loss as only one of many of its possible causes. A connection between loss and melancholia has often been made as a fleeting observation rather than a core element in discourses of melancholia that predate the twentieth century. Sigmund Freud posits in his 1917 essay “Mourning and Melancholia” that melancholia constituted a failure or dysfunction to mourn loss. This marks the first occasion where loss conceptually plays a critical role in the phenomenology of melancholia. Freud’s focus on loss may partly be explained by the time in which he lived, inasmuch as modernity is linked to loss. The word implies a state separated from the past and thus evokes in its name (*modernus*: “of today,” as distinct from “of yesterday”) a sense of a lost past. In reference to World War I Jonathan Flatley argues that “one of the central problems of modernity is the attempt to grapple with (...) the fact of a new scale, scope, and quality of loss itself.”⁴⁴ This does not exclude an optimistic or even revolutionary impulse through which the

⁴² Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Melancholie der Literatur*, 164.

⁴³ Mitscherlich, *Unfähigkeit zu trauern*.

⁴⁴ Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 31, cf. 28f.

project of European modernity promises social transformation and progress. However, realities of modernization in the early twentieth century did not live up to those promises, leaving the modern individual precariously suspended between hope and disappointment. An atmosphere of heady excitement for modern potential mixed with grave disappointment characterized the experience of World War I. The atrocities of the war, in which a human propensity for mass murder tangibly betrayed the promise of progress, produced losses on such a hitherto unimaginable scale that they were difficult to mourn. A heightened sense of loss and separation became a central feature of life, perhaps a new mode of experience.⁴⁵ Written during the war, Freud's text on loss and the practices of coping with it can be understood as a symptomatically modern text.⁴⁶

Freud's initial linkage of mourning and melancholia dates to his 1885 draft "Melancholia," in which he observes that "[t]he affect corresponding to melancholia is that of mourning—that is, longing for something lost." He adds, "in melancholia it must be a question of a loss."⁴⁷ Only later, following the development by his colleague Karl Abraham of the thesis that in melancholia mourning for a loss was delayed or dysfunctional, did Freud return to the idea of melancholia and loss.⁴⁸ Freud begins "Mourning and Melancholia" with a rather vague description of mourning that gives the impression that mourning is a concept commonly understood. The "normal affect" of mourning is, Freud writes, "regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to

⁴⁵ This is Flatley's argument, cf. *ibid.*, 30.

⁴⁶ At the same time, Freud's text is not free of images of melancholia that derive from the traditional discourse. He too paints melancholia as an opaque mystery that needs examination (like black bile). This is one of several examples on which Wagner-Egelhaaf draws to argue for traditional imagery in Freud. Cf. Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Melancholie der Literatur*, 22, 160ff.

⁴⁷ Sigmund Freud, "Draft G. Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. 1, Pre-Psycho-Analytic Publications and Unpublished Drafts (1886-1899)*, ed. James Strachy (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966), 200-206, here 200.

⁴⁸ Cf. Karl Abraham, "Notes on the Psycho-Analytical Investigation and Treatment of Manic-Depressive Insanity and Allied Conditions," in *Selected Papers of Karl Abraham* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1927), 137-56. Freud refers to Abraham's text, published in *Zentralblatt für Psychoanalyse* 2:6 (1912), in "Trauer und Melancholie," 428.

the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, and ideal, and so on."⁴⁹ Mourning is not pathological, though it interrupts the routine of an individual's life; melancholia, by contrast, is a "pathological disposition" (ibid.) marked by "profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment" (244). According to Freud, one of the marked differences between mourning and melancholia is that while the mourner experiences loss of interest in the world, in other people, in activity, and in love, he does not engage in the self-critical and self-deprecating mental exertions of the melancholic.

Freud describes the process of mourning as a strenuous "work of mourning" (*Trauerarbeit*): at the loss of an object "reality testing has shown that the love object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido be withdrawn from its attachments to that object."⁵⁰ Withdrawing libido is painful, for "people never willingly abandon a libidinal position." The process of detachment, which requires the mourner to withdraw libidinal energy even from every memory of the object, therefore takes considerable time and necessitates a temporary hallucination of the object to bridge that time: while detaching from it, the mourner pretends the object is still there. Finally, "respect for reality gains the day," and the mourner is free to make other libidinal attachments (244f.).

⁴⁹ Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 243. From now on page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

⁵⁰ Flatley argues that the concept of libido, which in Freud usually stands for either "the raw stuff of the sexual instinct" or an emotional tie defined by a love relationship, has a different meaning in "Mourning and Melancholia." Since the defining feature of melancholia is the self-critical stance vis-à-vis the ego that results from *negative* feelings towards the lost object, the term libido is expanded here to include any kind of affective attachment. Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 44.

Freud identifies two crucial differences between mourning and melancholia. First, in mourning the object lost is known to the mourner, who also knows why this loss affects him, but in melancholia either the melancholic is unclear what was lost, or, if the object is known, why the loss is important: he knows “*whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him” (245). For the melancholic, the instigating loss remains unclear, and so to make sense of melancholia, Freud then concentrates on the second difference. Distinct to melancholia but absent in mourning is “an extraordinary diminution in his [=the melancholic’s] self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale [eine großartige Ichverarmung].” Consequent to this difference, “in mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself” (246).⁵¹

At the origin of this devaluation Freud detects an internal splitting of the ego: “one part of the ego sets itself over against the other, judges it critically, and, as it were, takes it as its object” (247). Freud suggests that whereas the mourner has experienced the loss of an object, the melancholic struggles with the loss of her self. Yet criticism of the self is in reality criticism of the lost object that has been transferred onto the melancholic’s own ego. That split portion of the ego that exercises criticism over the rest of the ego is, Freud writes, “commonly called ‘conscience’ [*Gewissen*]” (Freud later calls this first the ego-ideal and then the super-ego). Its complaints are the expression of “dissatisfaction with the ego on moral grounds” (247f. [433f.]). Once Freud posits an analogy to mourning, by which self-criticism is a redirected criticism of the lost object, he reconstructs the logic of this process:

An object choice, an attachment of the libido to a particular person, had at one time existed; then, owing to a real slight or disappointment coming from this loved person, the object relationship was shattered.

⁵¹ Freud, “Trauer und Melancholie,” 431. Hereafter parenthetical bibliographic information in *italics* refers to the German original.

The result was not the normal one of withdrawal of the libido from this object and a displacement of it on to a new one, but something different, for whose coming-about various conditions seem to be necessary. The object cathexis proved to have little power of resistance and was brought to an end. But the free libido was not displaced on to another object; it was withdrawn into the ego. There, however, it was not employed in any unspecified way, but served to establish an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object. (249)

In melancholia, as in mourning, cathexis is detached from the lost object to which it had been attached, but unlike in mourning, it is not redirected to an internal hallucination of the lost object before becoming available for a new attachment. Instead, it attaches to the ego itself via identification of the ego with the lost object.

It is unclear, however, if the process at work here is identification. As Freud continues to explain identification in melancholia, he describes it as a “shadow of the object” that falls onto the ego. The ego is then judged as if it were the object, so thereby “the object-loss was transformed into a ego-loss.” Conflict between the ego and the lost object thus becomes an antagonism between “the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification” (249). In the logic of this interpretation, the object has been identified with the ego, but as Jonathan Flatley argues in a speculative reading of the passage, Freud’s use of the “shadow” metaphor may complicate matters. For Flatley the image of the shadow implies “not that the object has been *identified* with the ego but that it has gotten between the ego and the light” in a kind of shadow play that merely outlines the contours of the object onto a part of the ego.⁵² What is internalized is not the object itself (which is not identical to the ego) but the libidinal attachment (which serves as projector) and, more precisely, its negative aspects (the projection onto the ego). The term “identification” is, according to Flatley, misleading. “Introjection,” a term that Freud borrowed from Sandor Ferenczi and that

⁵² Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 46. Flatley’s argument remains speculative because Flatley does not sufficiently explain the mechanics of this so-called shadow play, and it remains unclear what the source of light is for him.

literally means “to throw in,” more suitably describes the interior projection of the object that casts a shadow on to the ego.⁵³

The introjected libidinal attachment, as mentioned, does not recapitulate the conflict between ego and object. It instead produces a conflict between parts of the ego. The conflict between ego and object is introjected as conflict between “Kern-Ich und Rand-Ich.”⁵⁴ Freud proposes that at the origin of this conflict lies an ambivalence present in libidinal attachments. An object’s loss is, Freud writes, “an excellent opportunity for the ambivalence in love-relationships to make itself effective and come into the open” (250). This is particularly true in cases where loss was the result not of death but of rejection, slight, or disappointment, and where the rejected or disappointed party experiences negative feelings on top of loss. When ambivalent love for a lost object is introjected, that is, when it “takes refuge in narcissistic identification,” then hatred operates toward the ego, “abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering” (251). This description appears to explain why melancholics, who have turned their violent impulses inwards and against themselves, often become suicidal, but it does not explain how mourners, unlike melancholics, deal with ambivalence when the loss of the love object occurs. Flatley argues that in the case of death, the prohibition not to speak ill of the dead promotes instant repression of negative feelings, whereas in the case of rejection or disappointment where there is no such prohibition in force, these feelings dominate.⁵⁵

⁵³ Cf. *ibid.*, 47. Introjection is also the terminus operandi for J. O. Wisdom in his comparative study of psychoanalytical theories of melancholia, J. O. Wisdom, “Die psychoanalytischen Theorien über die Melancholie,” *Jahrbuch der Psychoanalyse* 4 (1967), 102-54. Maria Torok and Nicolas Abraham use the concept of introjection in their revised and differentiated theory of melancholia that focuses on the crypt as locus of the melancholic; their articles are collected in Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel. Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), esp. 107-24, 125-28, 139-56. For a discussion of the crypt, cf. Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Melancholie der Literatur*, 169-72.

⁵⁴ Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Melancholie der Literatur*, 167.

⁵⁵ Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 48.

This appears logical, but one might ask whether it is not the very prohibition that blocks the normal process of mourning and causes a melancholic reaction to loss.

Freud observes with curiosity but without explanation that melancholia, like mourning, sometimes simply abates.⁵⁶ He speculates that the devaluation of the object (projected onto the ego) encourages the object's unconscious abandonment. Alternatively, it may be via the process of introjection that the emotional attachment itself is altered and thereby wanes. Whether one process or the other is in place, Freud concludes that after the completed "work of melancholia [*melancholische Arbeit*]," the ego enjoys "in this the satisfaction of knowing itself as the better of the two, as superior to the object" (257 [445]).

In comparing the work of mourning and the work of melancholia, at the end of both of which stands the ego's freedom to find a new libidinal attachment, Flatley asserts that melancholia, like mourning, includes potential for active productivity. He argues that melancholia is "active, transformative [and] ultimately antidepressive."⁵⁷ His reading is based on Freud's *The Ego and the Id*, published six years after "Mourning and Melancholia," in which Freud casts all losses as melancholic losses, so that therefore not even mourning leaves the ego unchanged.⁵⁸ By this account, the ego comprises accumulated loss. Flatley (among others)⁵⁹ interprets Freud's revision in

⁵⁶ Aristotle had observed the same, cf. Aristotle, *Problems*, 1502.

⁵⁷ Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 48.

⁵⁸ Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 19, The Ego and the Id and Other Works (1923-25)*, ed. James Strachy (London: The Hogarth Press, 1961), 3-140.

⁵⁹ This reading is certainly not unique to Flatley. Judith Butler, for instance, argues that the incorporation of lost objects into the ego forms its psychic topography: melancholia, by her account, is "precisely what interiorizes the psyche, that is, makes it possible to refer to the psyche through such topographical tropes. The turn from object to ego is the movement that makes the distinction between them possible, that marks the division, the separation of loss, that forms the ego to begin with." By this logic it is melancholia that makes the separation between self and otherness possible. Butler essentially argues that subjectivity is formed on the basis of a constitutive melancholia. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power. Theories in Subjection*, 170, cf. 72f. Elsewhere, Butler erases the distinction between melancholia and mourning altogether: "[T]he distinction finally between mourning and melancholia does not hold." Judith Butler, "After Loss, What Then?," in *Loss. The Politics of Mourning*, ed. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2003),

such a way that loss—as ego-transforming melancholic mourning, if not melancholia itself—forms the very character of the ego. And if the ego is shaped by loss, it must in return contain lost objects, “like an archive or archeological site.” In Flatley’s reading, Freud appears to suggest that “our losses become us.”⁶⁰ Under this interpretation, every lost object is archived by the ego. This reading has led to a dubious valorization of melancholia on which I comment later.

Freud’s essay on mourning and melancholia gained renewed currency in another German postwar context when psychoanalysts Alexander und Margarete Mitscherlich published *Von der Unfähigkeit zu trauern* in 1967. Their provocative study on the inability to mourn established, for a considerable period of time, mourning as the moral standard of ethical response to the Holocaust and the war horrors,⁶¹ though in fact the Mitscherlichs propounded the thesis that the Germans should have reacted not with mourning but with severe *melancholia*.⁶² Combining Freud’s theses in “Mourning and Melancholia” and “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego” (1921), the Mitscherlichs argued that the majority of Germans had libidinally bound together as a mass collective through their shared narcissistic love for their leader, Hitler, whom they established as their omnipotent ego-ideal to

467-73, here 472. For a critical reading of Butler, cf. Dominick LaCapra, “Trauma, Absence, Loss,” in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 43-85, here 72-74.

⁶⁰ Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 49.

⁶¹ In her dissertation Anna Parkinson analyzes the effects this emphasis on mourning as a moral standard has had on understanding cultural production in West Germany. Cf. Anna Parkinson, “Affective Passages. Emotion and Affect in Postwar West German Culture,” Diss. (Cornell University, 2007).

⁶² While the Mitscherlichs’ thesis on the inability to mourn stimulated important discussions regarding the Nazi past and must be considered one of the foundational texts of the discourse of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, it is also important to note that the Mitscherlichs chose Hitler as the lost object of mourning and/or melancholia and addressed other losses—those of the murdered, deported, and exiled Jews, the German civilian population, or the victims of warfare—only in passing. The crucial loss to be realized was that of Hitler, but with the derealization of the past “[erfolgte] auch später keine adäquate Trauerarbeit um die *Mitmenschen*.” With the emphasis on Hitler as the object of mourning, the Mitscherlichs seem to prescribe what proper or improper lost objects are. Mitscherlich, *Unfähigkeit zu trauern*, 35.

compensate for their own individual impotence (e.g., over the perceived shame of the First World War).⁶³ The libidinal focus on Hitler entailed a narcissistic phase, as the ego-ideal, which had formerly been conditioned by society not to act out aggressions, promised once again the realization of an infantile ideal of omnipotence and defeated formerly present forms of conscience: aggressions were lived out against outsiders. The old conscience only resurfaced with the death of Hitler. Because of the narcissistic love towards Hitler, his loss was experienced as a loss of the ego, and for this reason the Germans should have suffered from massive collective melancholia. Instead, libidinous energy was immediately cut off from Hitler and all personal involvement in the criminal past denied.⁶⁴

Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern um den erlittenen Verlust des Führers ist das Ergebnis einer intensiven Abwehr von Schuld, Scham und Angst; sie gelingt durch den Rückzug bisher starker libidinöser Besetzungen. Die Nazivergangenheit wird derealisiert, entwirklicht.

It is not the inability to mourn but the inability to be melancholic that is at stake here; thus the Mitscherlichs continue:

Als Anlass zur Trauer wirkt übrigens nicht nur der Tod Adolf Hitlers als realer Person, sondern vor allem das Erlöschen seiner Repräsentanz als kollektives Ich-Ideal. Er war (...) ein inneres Objekt. (...) [S]ein Tod und Entwertung durch Sieger bedeutet auch den Verlust eines narzisstischen Objekts und damit eine Ich- oder Selbstverarmung und -entwertung.⁶⁵

⁶³ Cf. *ibid.*, 71ff. Sigmund Freud, *Group-Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. 18, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works (1920-1922)*, ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), 65-143.

⁶⁴ The Mitscherlichs speak of conscious denial, not unconscious repression: "Wir sprechen korrekterweise von Verleugnung und nicht Verdrängung. Verleugnung ist ein Abwehrmechanismus, der sich auf störende Wahrnehmung der äußeren Realitäten bezieht. Störend heißt, dass die Wahrnehmung Unlust erweckt. Verdrängung gilt der Unlust bereitenden Wahrnehmung eigener Triebregungen," Mitscherlich, *Unfähigkeit zu trauern*, 39n1.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 34f.

The Mitscherlichs arrived at their conclusion by observing dominant forms of behavior in West Germans, which was marked on the one hand by “Abwehrmechanismen gegen die Nazivergangenheit” and on the other by “Reaktionsträgheit” on the socio-political level and “politische[r] Apathie (bei gleichzeitiger hochgradiger Gefühlsstimulierung im Konsumbereich).”⁶⁶ That is to say, the melancholic response was replaced by manic economic productivity and consumption. Apathy towards the postwar democratization process and the refusal to participate in building new democratic traditions resulted from preoccupation with the present consumer culture, coupled with the simultaneous derealization of a past that was dismissed as mere “Infektionskrankheit in Kinderjahren.”⁶⁷ A true melancholic response—which would have, according to Freud, eventually lifted and given way to mourning—would have been realized in the processes of remembering, repeating (or acting out), and working through the past: that is, in the coming to terms with the past, rather than devaluing it.⁶⁸

Allegorical Ersatz-World: Walter Benjamin

With Walter Benjamin, the discourse of melancholia shifts away again from a psychiatric paradigm of depression. But Benjamin’s notion of the melancholic as an archive of lost objects is undoubtedly informed by Freud.⁶⁹ Born, as he once noted, “under the sign of Saturn,” Benjamin himself suffered from persistent depression,⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Ibid., 17f.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 25, cf. 21.

⁶⁸ “Erinnern, wiederholen, durcharbeiten” is the title of a text in which Freud describes a sequence of consecutive steps that lead to coming to terms with, or *bewältigen*, the past. Sigmund Freud, “Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. 12, Case History of Schreber, Papers on Technique and Other Works (1911-1913)*, ed. James Strachy (London: The Hogarth Press, 1958), 146-56.

⁶⁹ Benjamin makes no reference to Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” in his work, but it has been argued that Benjamin was quite familiar with the text and Freud’s concept of melancholia. Cf. Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Melancholie der Literatur*, 175.

⁷⁰ The statement appears in both versions of Walter Benjamin, “Agesilaus Santander,” in *Walter Benjamin. Selected Writings, Vol. 2*, ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,

and themes of loss and melancholia infuse his writings.⁷¹ Two of Benjamin's works stand out in this regard. Both the 1925 *Der Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* and the unfinished 1939 notes on French poet Charles Baudelaire, *Zentralpark*, elaborate on allegory and melancholia.

While Benjamin seems to focus on the Baroque play in the *Trauerspiel* book, he also makes a connection to German Expressionism, thereby establishing the relevance of his study for the twentieth century well. What links the Baroque and modernity for Benjamin is that both are "Zeiten des Verfalls."⁷² In *Trauerspiel* Benjamin set out to illuminate an opaque Baroque genre, and key to his analysis were forms of expression peculiar to Baroque plays: "Beschäftigung mit deren Formenwelt, das ist der einzige Zugang zu dieser Dichtung. (...) Die Formen der barocken Dichtung (...) sind vor allem Formen des *Ausdrucks* (...). Mag diese Dichtung in der Formensprache wie immer dunkel und sinnlos erscheinen, das Studium ihrer Sprachform erhellt sie."⁷³ The form of expression at stake here is the allegory, but before turning to the allegory in part two of his book, Benjamin examined the historical context of the mourning play.

1999), 172f., 14f. Cf. Susan Sontag, "Under the Sign of Saturn," in *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1980), 109-34.

⁷¹ The literature on Benjamin and melancholia is vast. For the most thorough examination of Benjaminian melancholia, cf. Max Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics. Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning* (Amherst, Mass.: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1993). See also Beatrice Hannsen, "Portrait of Melancholy (Benjamin, Warburg, Panofsky)," in *Benjamin's Ghosts. Interventions in Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory*, ed. Gerhard Richter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 169-190; Françoise Meltzer, "Acedia and Melancholia," in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 141-69; Eric L. Santner, *On Creaturely Life. Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Wolfgang Bock, *Walter Benjamin--die Rettung der Nacht. Sterne, Melancholie und Messianismus* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2000); Marcus Bullock, "Bad Company. On the Theory of Literary Modernity and Melancholy in Walter Benjamin and Julia Kristeva," *Boundary 22*, no. 3 (1995), 57-79; David Kaufman, "Angels Visit the Scene of Disgrace. Melancholy and Trauma from Sebald to Benjamin and Back," *Cultural Critique* 70, no. 1 (2008), 94-119; Heidbrink, *Melancholie und Moderne*, 164-79.

⁷² Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, 235. From now on page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

⁷³ Walter Benjamin, "Porträt eines Barockpoeten," in *Walter Benjamin, Gesammelte Schriften III*, ed. Hella Tiedemann-Bartels (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1972), 86-88, here 87.

The theological and epistemological situation of the Baroque was marked by two new developments: the sudden “Ausfall aller Eschatologie” (259) and the understanding of absolute princely sovereignty (245). The former forced recognition of the ephemeral quality of things, while the latter included recognition of the possibility of princely fallibility and, consequently, catastrophe (246). The religious person held on to the world, even though she “[fühlt] mit ihr [=der Welt] sich einem Katarakt entgegentreiben. (...) Es gibt keine barocke Eschatologie; und eben darum einen Mechanismus, der alles Erdgeborene häuft und exaltiert, bevor es sich dem Ende überliefert” (246). With the secularization of history, the Baroque individual is reduced to a “Kreaturzustand” (270). The content of the Baroque mourning play, Benjamin argues, describes the individual’s existence in this “Naturgeschichte,” which is marked by her “Erleben nämlich der tötenden Zeit, der unausweichlichen Vergänglichkeit, des Sturzes aus den Höhen” (270).⁷⁴ Referencing the discourse of melancholia from the teachings of the four humors to Dürer’s *Melencolia*, Benjamin defines melancholia⁷⁵ as the “eigentlich kreatürliche [Intention]” from which the Baroque individual—and, in particular, the descendant of the Renaissance genius—suffers (324). The specific historical configuration of the Baroque replaces the melancholic Renaissance genius with the melancholic Baroque *allegorist*, whose “Kunstwollen” is equally strong (235) but whose medium is allegory with which he attempts to rescue “Dinge” from the ephemeral to the eternal.

⁷⁴ For a useful and concise discussion of the Benjaminian progression from (eschatological) history to natural history, exemplified in the mourning play by the changing role of the sovereign, cf. Burkhardt Lindner, “Allegorie,” in *Benjamins Begriffe, Vol. 1*, ed. Michael Opitz and Erdmut Wizisla (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2000), 50-94, here 56f.

⁷⁵ Benjamin does not distinguish between mourning and melancholia but uses both terms interchangeably. Wagner-Egelhaaf argues that Benjamin’s concept of mourning is identical to that of melancholia; according to her the lack of differentiation is due to Benjamin’s disinterest in melancholia as psychiatric condition. Cf. Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Melancholie der Literatur*, 175, 80.

The strongest motive of the allegorist is “die Einsicht ins Vergängliche der Dinge und jene Sorge, sie ins Ewige zu retten,” which places allegory “wo Vergänglichkeit und Ewigkeit am nächsten zusammenstoßen” (397). It also puts the allegorist near the “Abgrund des bodenlosen Tiefsinns” (404): the allegorist’s intuition of mortality and transitoriness causes the breakdown of the physical world into an “aggregation of signs” that seek interpretation.⁷⁶ Tirelessly and “verwandelnd, deutend und vertiefend,” the allegorist “vertauscht” these signs to escape his creaturely existence by discovering metaphysical importance in life (404). In this way allegorizing is “das einzige und das gewaltige Divertissement, das dem Melancholiker sich bietet” (361), and yet, the signs into which the allegorist transforms things are “Phantome von Phantomen, Reflexionen von Reflexionen, Kulissen, die nur andere Kulissen darstellen.”⁷⁷ In the process, he shatters things around him to give meaning to their shards, and in the end, his frenzy leads him to a “Trümmerfeld” (405). All the allegorist achieves is “die entleerte Welt *maskenhaft* neu[zubeleben]” (318, emphasis mine). This means that the allegorist does not imagine an “organisches, sondern ein dürres, abgestorbenes Leben.”⁷⁸ History thus appears in allegory as “erstarnte Urlandschaft”; the ephemeral “Antlitz” as eternal “Totenkopf” (343). While in allegory the thing is thus rescued as sign, it cannot shake its deadness.

This inescapable lifelessness is allegory’s patent failure, and yet Benjamin defends allegory: the power of the allegorist is to imagine the signs into which his melancholic gaze transforms things as he pleases. The devalued world of things becomes the elevated world of signs. Benjamin writes:

Wird der Gegenstand unterm Blick der Melancholie allegorisch, lässt sie das Leben von ihm abfließen, bleibt er als toter, doch in Ewigkeit

⁷⁶ Bainard Cowan, “Walter Benjamin’s Theory of Allegory,” *New German Critique* 22, Special Issue on Modernism (1981): 109-22, here 110.

⁷⁷ Schwarz, *Melancholie*, 406.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

gesicherter zurück, so liegt er vor dem Allegoriker, auf Gnade und Ungnade ihm überliefert. Das heißt: an Bedeutung kommt ihm das zu, was der Allegoriker ihm verleiht. (359)

Jonathan Flatley detects in the Benjaminian emphasis on the arbitrariness of the sign the melancholic's freedom to imagine a world as he pleases, for instance, without ruins. Therein lies according to Flatley the potential revolutionary element of the allegory.⁷⁹ The melancholic gaze allows for a differentiated historical insight (by interpreting history by its ruins, not its victories) and, by extension, Flatley argues tenuously, for political action. Flatley points to a 1931 review essay in which Benjamin sharply criticized Erich Kästner for practicing a self-indulgent left-wing melancholia bordering on nihilism. Benjamin writes that Kästner engaged in political radicalism not to the left of any real movement, but on the left of all possible movements, thus rejecting everything on principle. Such radicalism cannot translate into "corresponding political action," and as its (perhaps unintended) consequence it indirectly advances an attitude of "complacency and fatalism."⁸⁰ Reading and reinterpreting Benjamin's "Zentralpark," Flatley argues for an opposing concept of melancholia that, by dwelling on historical losses while simultaneously connecting those losses to present concerns, promotes a political interest in the present that in turn leads to political action.⁸¹ In what follows I hope to outline how Flatley arrives at this conclusion, which is hardly his alone but stands in for a recent current that valorizes melancholia based on its presumed productivity.

⁷⁹ Cf. Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 37.

⁸⁰ "Kurz, dieser linke Radikalismus ist genau diejenige Haltung, der überhaupt keine politische Aktion mehr entspricht. Er steht links nicht von dieser oder jener Richtung, sondern ganz einfach links vom Möglichen überhaupt. Denn er hat ja von vornherein nichts anderes im Auge als in negativistischer Ruh sich selbst zu genießen." Walter Benjamin, "Linke Melancholie," in *Walter Benjamin. Gesammelte Schriften. Vol. III*, ed. Hella Tiedemann-Bartels (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1972), 279-83, here 281. Trans. in Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 65.

⁸¹ "What emerges is the picture of a politicizing (...) melancholy." Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 65.

In “Zentralpark,” Benjamin establishes a modernist counterpart to the Baroque allegory, an equivalent he locates at the center of tension between *Erlebnis* (isolated experience devoid of emotional or mnemonic ties to other experiences) and *Erfahrung* (integrated, cohesive, and cumulative experience).⁸² For the Baroque allegorist the outside world appeared as ruins; for Baudelaire, the *internal* landscape of *memories* lay in ruins: this is the connection Benjamin draws between Baroque and modernist allegory. He writes, “[b]ut melancholy in the nineteenth century was different from what it had been in the seventeenth. The key figure in early allegory is the corpse, in late allegory it is the ‘souvenir’ [*Andenken*].”⁸³ Here the melancholic gaze is turned inwards and picks out an endless progression of mnemonic souvenirs:

The *souvenir* is the complement to “isolated experience” [*Erlebnis*]. In it is precipitated the increasing self-estrangement of human beings, whose past is inventoried as dead effects. In the nineteenth century, allegory withdrew from the world around us to settle in the inner world. The relic comes from the cadaver, the souvenir comes from the defunct experience which thinks of itself, euphemistically, as living.⁸⁴

Benjamin draws a distinction between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis* to mark the impoverishment of experience in modernity. Where previously people had entertained external bonds and experienced the outside world emotionally, namely as *Erfahrung*, they now guarded themselves against the “shocks” of modern life and experienced events as moments merely lived through (*Erlebnis*).⁸⁵ *Erlebnis* is without content because the past, discretized from the event, leaves no trace in the individual living through the moment. By contrast, *Erfahrung* is marked by “certain contents of the

⁸² The distinction is first introduced in Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” in *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings. Volume 4, 1938-1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 313-55.

⁸³ Walter Benjamin, “Central Park,” in *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings. Vol. 4, 1938-1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass., London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003) 161-99, here 190.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁸⁵ Benjamin, “Baudelaire,” 319.

individual past [that] combine in memory [*Gedächtnis*] with material from the collective past.”⁸⁶ Rather than collecting *Andenken*, in *Erfahrung* we practice *Eingedenken*: in contrast to fleeting memory without emotional tie (*Andenken*), Benjamin’s coinage *Eingedenken* describes something akin to commemoration.⁸⁷ In *Erfahrung* and *Eingedenken*, an emotional tie exists between the individual and the collective, but this bond is lost in *Erlebnis* and *Andenken*. Baudelaire’s melancholic inward gaze attended to what had been overlooked, or lost, by *Erlebnis*, and thus also to the fact of the impoverishment of modernity itself. It is unnecessary to examine Baudelaire’s inward gaze here, but it is of interest to note how Benjamin’s criticism of modernity—of shock *Erlebnisse*—relates to his concept of history.

Benjamin’s critique of modernity developed in tandem with his critique of historicism (*Historismus*), the predominant practice of historians who came after Leopold von Ranke in the nineteenth century. Von Ranke had advocated documenting history “the way it really was,”⁸⁸ focusing on political events judged by their victorious outcomes at the expense of documenting social change or the history of losers.⁸⁹ Benjamin took specific issue with the historicist practice of sympathizing “with the victor,” who in each case is heir to “prior conquerors.”⁹⁰ Benjamin argues that current rulers show their gratitude to the victors of the past by honoring “cultural treasures” of the past, yet these

⁸⁶ Ibid., 316.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 345n12.

⁸⁸ Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” in *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings. Volume 4, 1938-1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 389-400, here 391. The original Ranke quote reads: “[Die Historie] will bloß sagen, wie es eigentlich gewesen.”

⁸⁹ By treating every event as completely accounted for by its specific historical context without assessing its merit, historicism has been criticized for generalizing and relativizing values and norms, such as religion (Ernst Troeltsch’s criticism of historicism). For a detailed study of the history of historicism, its critics, and its revival, cf. Annette Wittkau, *Historismus. Zur Geschichte des Begriffs und des Problems* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1992). For an analysis of Jewish-German criticism of historicism in particular, cf. David N. Myers, *Resisting History. Historicism and its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁹⁰ Benjamin, “Concept of History,” 391.

owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great geniuses who created them, but also to the anonymous toil of others who lived in the same period. There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is never free of barbarism, so barbarism taints the manner in which it was transmitted from one hand to another. The historical materialist [as opposed to the historicist] therefore dissociates himself from this process of transmission as far as possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain.⁹¹

Brushing history against the grain is not the practice of the historicist, who delves into the past and “blot[s] out everything he knows about the later course of history.”⁹²

Benjamin rejected the notion of studying history *without* connecting it to the present. Like Kästner and left-wing melancholics, the historicist, in Benjamin’s account, is an escapist. The historicist works under the assumption that time is homogeneous and flows blindly in the direction of the future, leaving behind the past once it has happened and is over and done with, thus forestalling any chance for the past to have consequence in the present.⁹³ Benjamin suggests a different method of historical consciousness, which Flatley names “a practice of melancholic remembrance,”⁹⁴ “wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation.”⁹⁵ In melancholic remembrance the concern is for the present (via the emotional tie established through *Erfahrung*) while the gaze is directed towards the past, a past from which images blast forth to show us “the constellation into which [our] own era has entered along with a very specific earlier one.”⁹⁶ *Erfahrungen*, past and present, can enter into a connection because the emotions associated with them are

⁹¹ Ibid., 391f.

⁹² Ibid., 391.

⁹³ Cf. Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 71.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 72.

⁹⁵ Walter Benjamin, “N (On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress),” in *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass., London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1999), 456-88, here 462. Cit. in Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 72.

⁹⁶ Benjamin, “Concept of History,” 397.

immune to homogeneous time, i.e., they are not lost nor do they even fade.⁹⁷ This admits the coexistence of present- and past-time affects, and when the contemporary student of history establishes an emotional connection with the past and its losers and links it to his present condition, he realizes “how long his present misery has been in preparation.” Therein lies “what the historian must inwardly aim to show.”⁹⁸ The student of history equipped with melancholic remembrance grasps history not as homogeneous or empty time, but as “time filled full by now-time [*Jetztzeit*].” Thus Robespierre, for instance, read ancient Rome as “a past charged with now-time, as past which he blasted out of the continuum of history. The French Revolution viewed itself as Rome incarnate.”⁹⁹ Flatley interprets this passage to mean that Robespierre’s revolutionary impulse followed from melancholic remembrance of the past—the understanding of history as a connection between the past and the present, in which the past is not remembered as *Andenken* but *Eingedenken*. Flatley thus concludes that for Benjamin “the structure of revolutionary consciousness is necessarily melancholic; and, conversely, melancholia contains within it a revolutionary kernel.”¹⁰⁰

Flatley’s interpretation of historical materialism as a practice of revolutionary melancholia that brings the past and the present into a productive relationship is but one example of a recent reading of Benjamin’s melancholia. A more traditional reading, which focuses on the *Trauerspiel* book and the allegorical gaze onto the ruins of history, has given way to an interpretation of melancholia as a moment of productivity. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, for instance, also view in melancholia a creative process of “active mourning” that mediates “a hopeful (...) relationship between loss and history.”¹⁰¹ Challenging the traditional interpretation of

⁹⁷ Cf. Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 73.

⁹⁸ Benjamin, “N (Theory of Knowledge),” 481.

⁹⁹ Benjamin, “Concept of History,” 395.

¹⁰⁰ Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 74.

¹⁰¹ Eng and Kazanjian, “Mourning Remains,” 2.

Benjamin's and Freud's theories of melancholia, which established similar relationships between hopelessness and despair, Eng and Kazanjian—and most authors who contributed to their volume *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*—suggest “a better understanding of melancholic attachments to loss.” On the one hand, they rely on Benjamin's insistence that knowledge of the past must inform political activism in the present, and on the other, they rely on Freud's description of the process of withdrawing libidinous energy from the lost object in a number of “countless separate struggles.”¹⁰² This “better” understanding in their view focuses on the melancholic's continuing relationship with the past and her ongoing engagement with loss. “While mourning abandons lost objects by laying their histories to rest,” Eng and Kazanjian claim, “melancholia's continued and open relation to the past *finally* allows us to gain new perspectives on and new understandings of lost objects.”¹⁰³ The melancholic return to losses, in other words, creates a hermeneutic domain of “traces open to signification.”¹⁰⁴ The result is a continuous revaluation of lost objects that challenges and changes the socio-political and cultural realms. Herein, Eng and Kazanjian essentially argue, lies the creative productivity of melancholia “for history and for politics.”¹⁰⁵ Judith Butler expands this position further by arguing that loss, and the melancholic mourning that results from it, are preconditions for a sense of community, “where community does not overcome a loss, where community *cannot* overcome the loss without losing the very sense of itself.”¹⁰⁶ By this interpretation, loss is revaluated as absolute foundation for community.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Ibid., 3, cf. 5, 4. “Countless separate struggles,” Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 256.

¹⁰³ Eng and Kazanjian, “Mourning Remains,” 4. Emphasis mine. This argument essentially dismisses mourning—and related processes of working through—altogether.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰⁶ Butler, “After Loss, What Then?,” 468.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. LaCapra, “Trauma, Absence, Loss,” 51. LaCapra has engaged in a critique of the volume *Loss* in particular in his recent work, cf. “‘Traumatropisms’: From Trauma via Witnessing to the Sublime,” in *History and Its Limits. Human, Animal, Violence* (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 2009), 59-89, here 82n44, cf. 82-85.

The valorization of melancholia, as practiced by Flatley, Eng and Kazanjian, and Butler, amounts to an idealization of a community of loss, which leaves important questions unanswered. The contributors to *Loss* argue that their understanding of melancholia is “better” because it establishes the link between melancholia and socio-political (or revolutionary, in Flatley’s words) productivity, yet it is unclear how a continuing and open relationship with the past via hermeneutics and signification engages productively with the socio-political realm of the present. Continuous revaluation of loss undoubtedly pertains to the socio-political sphere, but theorists of productive and creative melancholia fail to explain how such challenge translates effectively into action and change. To be politically and socially effective, melancholia cannot sufficiently address loss without being supplemented by other processes, such as those of working through, that help to imagine a future. The valorization of melancholia effectively marginalizes these other processes, which is why theorists of melancholic communities sometimes privilege trauma as a conceptual framework, because trauma is often believed to produce endless melancholia that forecloses working through. The confusion of historical trauma with a transhistorical register of trauma that posits melancholia as the foundation of community is highly problematic for reasons I explain at the end of the chapter.

Melancholia and the West German Novel

Benjamin’s melancholic remembrance and melancholic gaze mark *memoria* and *imaginatio* as the two cognitive powers constitutive of melancholia. Throughout the centuries, the discourse of melancholia stressed these two traits.¹⁰⁸ Ficino’s melancholic prototype, the scholar, was possessed of a good memory with which he first imagined and then recognized universal connections. Dürer’s *Melancholia*

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Melancholie der Literatur*, 152, 203.

presents us with an image of melancholia that was the product of the artist's own melancholic imagination. Likewise, Burton's *Anatomy*, which is so unstructured and disorderly that it performs the disorderly melancholia the author attempts to fight, presents itself as a large catalogue of thematic quotations, and thus as an archive of melancholia itself. Claiming encyclopedic completeness but apparently lacking any systematic order, Burton's multi-volume work has the structural quality of a literary *Wunderkammer* or, as Jean Starobinski conceptualizes the melancholic's mental processes, a labyrinth.¹⁰⁹ Memory and imagination are the melancholic's curses: Aristotle had already noted that the melancholic's memory does not serve him, as it does the talented orator, but rather takes possession of him. His imagination, too, is not just a mark of genius but, like a river without banks, floods the melancholic and sweeps him along.¹¹⁰ In psychiatric literature, the melancholic tendency to dwell on the past and to resist participating in the present has been widely remarked upon,¹¹¹ and it is the goal of psychoanalysis to help the melancholic to retrieve from his unconsciousness the memory of the lost object. It is melancholia's backwards turn to the past in connection with its uninhibited imagination that makes it fertile ground for reflection and an unspooling of associative chains. The cognitive powers of remembering, thinking, reflecting, and associating mark the melancholic as an intellectual, and often her preferred medium is writing.

In addition to the melancholic activity of writing, writing is also the *refuge* sought by the melancholic to escape melancholia. Related to both poetic melancholia

¹⁰⁹ Jean Starobinski, "L'encre de la mélancolie," *La Nouvelle Revue Française* 11, no. 123 (1963), 410-23. For a discussion of Starobinski and the figure of the labyrinth, cf. Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Melancholie der Literatur*, 16ff., 213.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Melancholie der Literatur*, 204.

¹¹¹ Cf. Ludwig Binswanger, *Melancholie und Manie. Phänomenologische Studien* (Pfullingen: Naske, 1960), 23ff; Hubertus Tellenbach, *Melancholie. Zur Problemgeschichte, Typologie, Pathogenese und Klinik* (Berlin: Springer, 1961), 135ff.

and the melancholy genius of the Renaissance, “heroic melancholy”¹¹² denoted the melancholic’s attempts to escape melancholia by aesthetic production, mainly through writing. As Burton wrote in his *Anatomy of Melancholy*, “I write of melancholy, by being busy to avoid melancholy.”¹¹³ The notion of writing as means of giving form to melancholia, defined by Julia Kristeva as an otherwise “non-communicable grief,” in particular during times when one does not suffer from it and wants to prepare for the next melancholy episode, survives today, as when Kristeva writes that “for those who are racked by melancholia, writing about it would have meaning only if writing sprang out of that very melancholia.”¹¹⁴ Writer Djuna Barnes found additionally that *reading* about melancholia helped her combat her own depression, and *The Anatomy of Melancholy* was one of the books she cherished most. In line with Burton’s assessment that writing had a therapeutic effect she wrote *Nightwood* (1936), the working title of which had been *Anatomy of the Night*. One of the author’s friends called it ““a second *Anatomy of Melancholy*.””¹¹⁵ The German translation of *Nightwood* was prepared by Wolfgang Hildesheimer, the main subject of this chapter, who was greatly influenced by Barnes and considered that writing his novel *Masante* would have been impossible had he not had knowledge of *Nightwood*.¹¹⁶ Writing and melancholia are thus intimately connected for many commentators and practitioners: melancholia is a destructive muse, and writing is deemed to be its therapy. As Ludwig Völker argues in his study *Muse Melancholie—Therapeutikum Poesie*, the connection between melancholia, *memoria*, *imaginatio*, and writing makes literature, among other

¹¹² Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 36.

¹¹³ Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 20.

¹¹⁴ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 3.

¹¹⁵ Garry Sherbert, “Hieroglyphics of Sleep and Pain. Djuna Barnes’ *Anatomy of Melancholy*,” in *Response to Death. The Literary Work of Mourning*, ed. Christian Riegel (Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta, 2005), 117-44, here 119.

¹¹⁶ Djuna Barnes, *Nachtgewächs*, trans. Wolfgang Hildesheimer (Pfullingen: Neske, 1959). Cf. Hildesheimer and Durzak, “Potentielles Ich,” 275.

kinds of writing, a privileged field of the melancholic.¹¹⁷ Similarly, Wagner-Egelhaaf, in her work of melancholia and literature, concludes that melancholia underlies the “Produktionsprinzip des kryptischen Textes, dessen Dechiffrierung vielfach verschlungene, labyrinthische Erzählungen freisetzt,”¹¹⁸ referring to modes of writing and reading characteristic of twentieth-century texts in particular.

Within the field of literature, György Lukács’s 1914/15 *Theorie des Romans* situates the twentieth-century novel vis-à-vis melancholia. Lukács’s assertion that the novel is an expression of “transcendental homelessness” has frequently been cited to explain melancholia in literature.¹¹⁹ The modern novel, as opposed to the epic articulating a “totality of life,” no longer had access to the historico-philosophical reality of an integrated civilization such as ancient Greece, but communicated a problematic or broken society.¹²⁰ The novel expressed melancholia over the historical process of trading the experience of totality for fragmented, prosaic experiences. Hence Lukács writes: “The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has

¹¹⁷ Völker, *Muse Melancholie*.

¹¹⁸ Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Melancholie der Literatur*, 23.

¹¹⁹ György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel. A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1971), 41. Cf. the introductory essay in Manfred Durzak, *Gespräche über den Roman* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1976), 9-49. Blamberger makes use of Lukács’s theory in defining Hildesheimer’s melancholic work, cf. Blamberger, *Versuch Gegenwartsroman*, 20-23.

¹²⁰ Lukács’s theory of the novel is based on Hegel’s differentiation between the epic and the novel. Hegel conceptualized the epic as the expression of the ancient totality of life, whereas he defined the novel as an expression of the contemporary *broken* world, which aimed at totality but failed to achieve it. Hegel wrote that the epic’s form and content were defined by “[der] gesamte[n] Weltanschauung und Objektivität eines Volksgeistes.” He continued, “[z]u dieser Totalität gehört einerseits das religiöse Bewußtsein von allen Tiefen des Menscheingeistes; andererseits das konkrete Dasein, das politische und häusliche Leben, bis zu den Weisen, Bedürfnissen und Befriedigungsmitteln der äußerlichen Existenz hinunter” (330). The content of the epic is “das Ganze einer Welt, in der eine individuelle Handlung geschieht” (373). By contrast, the modern novel—“[die] moderne(n) bürgerliche(n) Epopöe”—aims at expressing the “Hintergrund einer totalen Welt,” but because it “setzt eine bereits zur *Prosa* geordnete Wirklichkeit voraus,” it fails at accomplishing its goal (392), G. W. F. Hegel, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel Werke. Bd. 15, Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik III*, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1986).

become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality.”¹²¹ The novel therefore operates under a utopian or epistemological mission: it becomes for Lukács the medium to reflect on reality, to point out reality’s brokenness, and to motivate the search for overcoming this imperfect condition. According to Lukács, the novel performs the task of experimentally imagining a meaning or purpose to existence that is no longer experienced in reality. Because it never arrives at a satisfactory answer or conclusion and confirms “the fundamental dissonance of existence,” the *affirmation* of dissonance is “the form [of the novel] itself” (71). In the formal perseverance of dissonance the novel answers the search for totality dialectically: “[T]he immanence of meaning required by the form is attained precisely when the author goes all the way, ruthlessly, towards exposing its absence” (72). Searching for totality by postulating its absence leaves the novel in a state of incompleteness; the novel is permanently in “process of becoming” (73). Lukács identifies this process as the novel’s “inner form,” and the direction it takes is that of the “individual’s journeying towards himself” on the “road from dull captivity (...) towards clear self-recognition” (80). Through self-recognition, totality appears to move within reach, but it remains unattainable.

Lukács warns of two dangers inherent in the modern novel’s epistemological mission: on the one hand, the search for totality may lead to escapism, which produces novels that paint a conventionally idyllic picture no longer concerning reality and thereby providing mere “entertainment” (71). On the other hand, if the author’s subjective reflection on her existence becomes the central concern of the novel, the epistemological mission stops short of suggesting ways of overcoming the defunct present and leads instead to resignation in the face of reality (*ibid.*). The writer must therefore master a balance between too much and too little reflection. The reflective

¹²¹ Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, 56. From now on page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

moment, which holds a mirror up to the present condition and provokes “the *deepest melancholy* of every great and genuine novel,” is for Lukács both absolutely necessary and potentially harmful to the utopian project and the writer alike (85).¹²² Should the author succumb to too much reflection, the novel fails to communicate a utopian project. In other words, it gives way to traditional melancholia, which pathologically mourns, endlessly and without hope. Just the right amount of reflection (which Lukács fails to identify), on the other hand, allows for imagining of how the world could be, setting a goal to reach in an ideal future.

One of Lukács’s readers who distinguished between productive, future-oriented melancholia and unproductive, past-oriented melancholia is Günter Blumberger. Writing forty years after the Holocaust, but ignoring the differences between the post-Holocaust context and Lukács’s operative framework, Blumberger located the contemporary West German novel under the sign of melancholia.¹²³ Starting with Adorno’s assessment of melancholia as “würdevolle Verzweiflung” that marked “die einzig noch angemessene Haltung angesichts der Insuffizienz menschlicher Ratio”¹²⁴ and reading works by Hildesheimer, Heinrich Böll, and Günter Grass,¹²⁵ Blumberger concluded that postwar melancholia, as articulated by literature, spoke for “ethische[s] Engagement” by West German writers. No longer was

¹²² Emphasis mine. Melancholic reflection is harmful to the author because “the writer’s naivety suffers extreme violence and is changed into its opposite.” “Pure reflexion [sic]” is, according to Lukács, “profoundly inartistic,” Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, 85.

¹²³ Cf. the full title of his study, *Versuch über den deutschen Gegenwartsroman. Krisenbewußtsein und Neubegründung im Zeichen der Melancholie*. After providing a summary of the discourse of melancholia, Blumberger turns to Lukács’s theory of the novel to argue that, in the twentieth century, melancholia no longer posited a metaphysical but an ethical and social problem. Despite this claim, Blumberger fails to situate melancholia vis-à-vis the specific post-Holocaust context he seeks to analyze.

¹²⁴ Blumberger, *Versuch Gegenwartsroman*, 7. Blumberger paraphrases Adorno without reference to specific texts by Adorno.

¹²⁵ Blumberger promises in the introduction a close interpretation of Hildesheimer’s absurd prose, Böll’s *Ansichten eines Clowns*, and Grass’s *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke*, however, his discussion of each author is cursory at best. Cf. the critical review-essay, W. G. Sebald, “Review of: Versuch über den deutschen Gegenwartsroman. Krisenbewußtsein und Neubegründung im Zeichen der Melancholie,” *The Modern Language Review* 82, no. 4 (1987), 1042f.

melancholia invoked or a melancholic mood described to express a metaphysical dilemma, but in Blamberger it addressed pressing questions of social and ethical concern.¹²⁶ Blamberger saw West German literature, especially as represented by Böll and Grass, as having answered the Mitscherlichs' demand for a morally responsible literature, namely "durch [der Schriftsteller] Gestaltung von melancholischen Außenseitern und deren stellvertretender Trauer."¹²⁷ Through the efforts of writers, the dimension of mourning entered political discourse: "[ihrer] Vorarbeit ist es mitzuverdanken, dass das Zeichen der Trauer auch die offizielle deutsche Politik in den siebziger Jahren bestimmt."¹²⁸ It is unnecessary to assess the accuracy of Blamberger's conclusion here, although there is much evidence that at the time of his writing, in 1985, German politics in fact took a relativist turn before addressing in more focused ways issues of commemorating and mourning the past.¹²⁹ It is interesting to note, however, that Blamberger distinguishes between Grass and Böll, on the one hand, and Hildesheimer, on the other. Blamberger detects in Grass and Böll a melancholia in dialogue with practical reason and societal demands, one that aids the process of recognizing failures in the past so as to pave the way for a better future. This transitory melancholia assists "vom Schlechten zum Nächstbesseren." Melancholia here includes a utopian kernel; although it knows its limits and seeks mere mitigation, not abolition of suffering, melancholia is, according to Blamberger and in reference to Lukács, the "Wegbereiterin der Utopie."¹³⁰ Hildesheimer's melancholia, in contrast, acts not in the service of society but against it: it seeks

¹²⁶ Blamberger, *Versuch Gegenwartsroman*, 7, 47.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 55. Blamberger does not cite where the Mitscherlichs make this demand.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ The so-called Bitburg affair, during which Ronald Reagan visited the Bitburg cemetery to honor the German war dead, including members of the SS, occurred in 1985. The Historians' debate began the next year. Cf. Geoffrey H. Hartman (ed.), *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Jürgen Habermas, *The New Conservatism. Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989).

¹³⁰ Blamberger, *Versuch Gegenwartsroman*, 58.

pleasure in grievances and uses existential categories such as life, suffering, and death, to point to the “immerwährende und unaufhebbare Defektheit menschlicher Gemeinschaft und menschlichen Daseins hin.” Blamberger argues that this form of melancholia, as practiced by Hildesheimer (and, he adds, Adorno) is accompanied by an “Eliteanspruch” of having exclusive knowledge of this defective condition and living with it “in Würde.”¹³¹

Blamberger was not the only critic to read Hildesheimer through Lukács’s conceptualization of the novel. Manfred Durzak observed of Hildesheimer that the author of *Tynset* and *Masante* failed to meet Lukács’s standard: in both novels

zeichnet sich der Reflex auf eine als sinnleer empfundene Wirklichkeit in einem zunehmenden Verzicht auf die Sinnsuche des Helden [aus], der bei Hildesheimer zum reinen reflektierenden Ich geworden ist, das im äußerlichen Moment des Reisens seine innerliche Unrast und Sinnsuche kompensiert und nur noch in einzelnen verbalen Aufschwüngen ein Existenzgefühl zu verwirklichen vermag, das den Verlust der faktischen Realität augenblickhaft vergessen lässt.¹³²

Hildesheimer thus succumbed, according to Blamberger and Durzak, to what Lukács called the danger of the modern novel: reflection on the narrator’s subjective existence replaces concern for totality, and the narrator resigns vis-à-vis reality. Where Durzak compares Hildesheimer’s work with Lukács’s theory of the novel without value judgment—pointing instead to the possibility that *Tynset* and *Masante* should not to be categorized as novels at all¹³³—Blamberger negatively assesses Hildesheimer’s work

¹³¹ Ibid., 57f. .

¹³² Durzak, *Gespräche über den Roman*, 38.

¹³³ Ibid., 39. Durzak bases his statement on Hildesheimer’s own insistence that *Tynset* is not a novel. In an interview Durzak presses Hildesheimer to acknowledge that *Masante* carries the classification “Ein Roman” as subtitle. Hildesheimer responds that this was a choice by his publisher and not his own, suggesting that in his view *Masante* too does not fit the category of the novel (although he admits that it is “mehr Roman (...) als *Tynset*.”) Hildesheimer and Durzak, “Potentielles Ich,” 287. In the collected works edition (which Hildesheimer supervised), *Tynset* and *Masante* appear in the volume entitled “Monologische Prosa,” as opposed to the volume “Erzählende Prosa” that contains Hildesheimer’s first novel, *Paradies der falschen Vögel*, or “Biographische Prosa,” which includes his fictional biography

in his study on the melancholic German postwar novel. Taking Lukács's theory as a standard of measuring, Blamberger judges only the works of Grass and Böll as novelistic successes, since they contain, in his assessment, the utopian kernel that he values in melancholia. For him, this kernel must be present in order for the novel to fulfill the Mitscherlichs' request for responsible literature.

At the end of this chapter I discuss a comparative study of Hildesheimer and Grass that results in vastly different findings. Its author is W. G. Sebald, who voices his preference for melancholy writing as practiced by Hildesheimer, which today is often considered the ethically adequate literary response to the Holocaust. Before discussing Sebald's reading of Hildesheimer and the inherent dangers of postulating melancholia as an ethical response to loss, I now consider Hildesheimer and his melancholic work *Tynset* (1965). I do not dispute the status of *Tynset* as a melancholic text; however, I do argue that reading the novel exclusively under the aspect of melancholia is reductive and obscures other processes at work.

Melancholia or *Weltschmerz*? Hildesheimer's *Tynset*

Interpreters of Hildesheimer's work often base their assessments of his melancholia on comparisons between the author, his narrators, and several of Shakespeare's melancholy characters that resurface in Hildesheimer's work. Thus Hildesheimer's melancholia has been compared to that of Hamlet, Yorick, and Jacques.¹³⁴ *Tynset*, whose narrator repeatedly engages with Hamlet (in the form of

Marbot. Cf. Wolfgang Hildesheimer, *Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Gesammelte Werke in sieben Bänden*, ed. Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig and Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991).

¹³⁴ For the comparison with Hamlet, cf. Burckhard Dücker, *Wolfgang Hildesheimer und die deutsche Literatur des Absurden* (Bensberg-Frankenhorst 1976), 87; Puknus, *Wolfgang Hildesheimer*, 87; Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig, "Flucht--Trotz. Eine Collage aus und mit und über Wolfgang Hildesheimers Ästhetik des Zwischenraums," *Neue Rundschau* 98, no. 2 (1987), 82-99, here 83; Walter Jens, "Hamlet. Das Genie der Poeten," *Mythen der Dichter. Modelle und Variationen* (Munich: Kindler, 1993), 99-128; Franz Loquai, *Hamlet und Deutschland. Zur literarischen Shakespeare-Rezeption im 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, Weimar: Metzler, 1993), 192-214. For Jaques (of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*), cf. Klaus Reichert, "Aus der Fremde und zurück. Wolfgang Hildesheimer zum Siebzigsten," *Neue*

Hamlet's ghost, his father's ghost, or a production of *Hamlet*)¹³⁵, especially provoked a critical assessment of the novel that focused on the narrator's and Hildesheimer's own melancholia or, as one of *Tynset*'s first reviewers, Reinhard Baumgart, called it, "Weltschmerz."¹³⁶

The Reception: Weltschmerz

Baumgart's review of *Tynset*, published in *Der Spiegel* and as such one of the most influential of its reviews, was not sympathetic to Hildesheimer's narrator, who in one night wanders through his house and allows objects inside it to excite his imagination and spur his memory. "Vor der Klagemauer," the title Baumgart intended for his review, was published as "Schlaflos schluchzend," and both titles, with their operative verbs *klagen* (to lament or elegize) and *schluchzen* (to weep or sob), already point to Baumgart's main criticism: Hildesheimer's "Weltschmerz-Rhetorik."¹³⁷ The novel struck Baumgart as a series of incomplete notes (not as "Buch") that existed "im ratlosen Nebeneinander" and pointed to the author's inability to finish "das hier Geplante."¹³⁸ Baumgart summarized *Tynset* in one sentence, citing the narrator's

Rundschau 98, no. 2 (1987), 67-81, here 67ff. Finally, for Yorick, cf. Puknus, *Wolfgang Hildesheimer*, 147.

¹³⁵ Wolfgang Hildesheimer, *Tynset* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1965), 20, 89, 107, 86, 266.

¹³⁶ Reinhard Baumgart, "Vor der Klagemauer [Schlaflos schluchzend]," in *Über Wolfgang Hildesheimer*, ed. Dierk Rodewald (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1971), 115-18. Most reviewers of *Tynset* remarked upon the role of the Hamlet motif, e.g., considering it problematic and identifying it as a weakness of the novel, cf. Rudolf Hartung, "Hamlet in Graubünden," *Der Monat* 17, no. 6 (1965), 322-25. "Die Ausschweifungen eines Melancholikers" are remarked upon as tiresome and even as obstacles to finishing reading the text, Jens Hoffmann, "Im Winterbett. Die Ausschweifungen eines Melancholikers," *Christ und Welt*, March 19, 1965. Hildesheimer's melancholia is lamented in terms of a loss of his previous humor, cf. Uwe Schulz, "Tynset oder Der Abschied vom Humor," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, June 26, 1965. Positive reviews of *Tynset* that discuss Hildesheimer as "gebildeten Melancholiker" include Günter Blöcker, "Stegreifspiel der Motive," *Merkur* 19 (1965), 486-87, here 486; Helmut Heissenbüttel, "Nur Erfindung, nur Täuschung?," *Die Welt*, March 18, 1965, reprinted in Rodewald, 118-21; Domin, "Denk ich an Deutschland in der Nacht."

¹³⁷ Cf. Rodewald, ed. *Über Wolfgang Hildesheimer*, 115 fn; Baumgart, "Klagemauer [Schlaflos schluchzend]," 116.

¹³⁸ With heavy sarcasm Baumgart calls Hildesheimer "aufrichtig" because the author did not call his "Aufzeichnungen" a novel. Baumgart, "Klagemauer [Schlaflos schluchzend]," 115.

insomnia and his reflections, which are interrupted by self-contained stories. These short narratives were to Baumgart's liking, but they have one shortcoming:

Diese Geschichten haben nur einen Fehler: Sie hören auf. Denn das letzte Wort behält immer der Erzählende selbst, der schlaflos weiterläuft und weiterliegt, der die breiten Zwischenräume zwischen seinen Geschichten ausfüllt mit schwermütiger Spekulation. Es ist, als würden dauernd Milchglasscheiben zwischen die Erzählungen geschoben, beschlagen mit einem Hauch von tiefempfundenen Seufzern über das Sinnlose an Gott und Welt, Leben und Tod. Weltschmerz hätte das früher geheißen, heute tauft es sich gern auf den strengen Namen "Entfremdung." Diese Klagerede möchte offenbar radikal sein durch Allgemeinheit, gerät aber durch ihre Allgemeinheit nur unverbindlich, zu Weltschmerz-Rhetorik. (116)

For Baumgart, the interrupter who disturbs the flow of the narratives with his metaphysical sighs is not the narrator of *Tynset* but its author: "er scheint Satz für Satz, Geste um Geste bitterlich mit dem Redenden einverstanden zu sein. Das Redende ist niemand anders als der Autor selbst: Wolfgang Hildesheimer." Hildesheimer's *Weltschmerz* explains for Baumgart why the reflective passages in the book stand between "der Wahrheit des Berichts oder Tagebuchs und der anderen Wahrheit des Erfindens und Erzählens" (117). In choosing this unfortunate "Mittelweg" between fact and fiction "[bleiben] die bekennenden Partien so gekünstelt und durchaus unpersönlich (...). Unermüdlich schwingt sich die Sprache in Höhen und fällt kläglich zurück auf Gemeinplätze. Klischees werden abgeweidet wie blühende Wahrheit." In contrast to the *Weltschmerz* of the author, the embedded narratives, which tell "von Labyrinthen, von jähem Tod, ratloser Schuld, von vergeblichen Ausblicken in ein Jenseits zu diesem Diesseits," are "von einem melancholischen Weitblick herangezogen." Baumgart thus proposes a dichotomy between phony and real melancholia, between Hildesheimer's reflections (which Baumgart considers fact and the source of phony melancholia) and his narratives (fiction and real melancholia). He

then asks, why was “eine Klagemauer nur aus Geschichten” not enough? Why did Hildesheimer send himself “als Maurer und schluchzend auf die Szene?” Referring to new trends in literary criticism and theory, Baumgart speculates that Hildesheimer heard the rumors “aus Paris” of the end of fiction, which by Baumgart’s interpretation required writing about factual experience. Experience, Baumgart writes, is evoked often enough in *Tynset* without finding real expression in the text: “Fortwährend wird so Erfahrung beteuert, fast nie erscheint sie.” He continues, “[d]enn bloße Meinung, so gut oder tief oder schmerzhaft sie sich auch fühlen mag, zählt nichts in der Literatur, es sei denn, sie beglaubige sich durch Sprache. Das Unerhörte in fein klischierten Sätzen ist nicht länger unerhört, sondern lästig bekannt” (117). Here Baumgart connects Hildesheimer’s calling on experience with something outrageous (*unerhört*, similar to *ungehört*, unheard of and suggesting something unknown) that is, according to the reviewer, long and annoyingly well known. The outrageous or unknown of which Baumgart speaks must, if we follow his argument, be the narrator’s (and therefore Hildesheimer’s) *Weltschmerz*, which according to Baumgart laments the pointlessness of God, the world, life and death. Is that really “das Unerhörte” that is “lästig bekannt”? Before answering this question, we consider one more review.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Several reviewers mirror Baumgart’s (and Neumann’s, see below) tenor: Franz Schonauer, whose review appeared in several smaller newspapers all over West Germany, laments that Hildesheimer has nothing “tatsächlich Wichtiges mitzuteilen” and instead bores the reader, who cannot make it past page 11. The monologue is “trist und larmoyant (...); Fragen, Seufzer, müde, mit halber Stimme vorgebrachter Klagen, auf die es keine Antworten gibt,” Franz Schonauer, “Denk ich an Tynset in der Nacht,” *Kölner Stadtanzeiger*, April 1, 1965. Rudolf Hartung recommends: “Er [=Hildesheimer] wird sie [=die Gefahren des Schreibens], vielleicht, vermeiden können, wenn er sich nach diesen Erinnerungen und Meditationen einer schlaflosen Nacht der Gegenwart und dem Tag zuwendet,” addressing, however indirectly, that the narrator’s nightly reflections concern events of the past, Hartung, “Hamlet in Graubünden.” One review is particularly dismissively entitled “Das Plätschern plätschert...,” and its (unnamed) author summarizes *Tynset* as follows: “Er [=Hildesheimer] versteht es auch allzu gut, Nichtigkeiten, platte Banalitäten in dem nie stockenden Fluss seiner Gedanken unterzubringen. Die Seichtheit solcher Passagen wird durch das überstrapazierte Kunstmittel der Wiederholung nur umso deutlicher,” N. N., “Das Plätschern plätschert...” *Mannheimer Morgen*, September 8, 1965. Paul Hübner finally calls Hildesheimer’s method of discussing “gewisse” criminal themes as “eine ziemlich primitive Krimimethode,” several newspapers, cf. Paul Hübner, “Tynset,” *Rheinische Post*, May 15, 1965.

Just days after Baumgart's review appeared, Peter Horst Neumann published his review in *Stuttgarter Zeitung* under the title "Hamlet will schlafen."¹⁴⁰ Referring to Shakespeare's melancholic character and the much-noted interlocutor of Hildesheimer's work, but making light of the tragic hero's cause for lament, Neumann echoes Baumgart in his pejorative review vis-à-vis the narrator's work of mnemonic reflection. He too criticizes Hildesheimer for including too much of something well known: "Zuviel fällt Hildesheimer ein, aber es ist ein Altes. An Stoff herrscht eher Überfluss statt Mangel, freilich an abgenutztem." He calls this surfeit "Überflüssige[s]," "Banale[s]," "Belanglosigkeiten," and "Platitüde[n]," accusing the copy editor at the publishing house Suhrkamp, who should have served Hildesheimer as "schützende[r] Engel," of having failed in his task by not deleting those passages containing platitudes. Most offensive to Neumann is Hildesheimer's tactlessness in establishing parallels—to what, Neumann leaves unsaid. If Hildesheimer had kept discretion, *Tynset* could "vielleicht" have become "ein Meisterwerk":

Ein Autor, dessen Stärke und *Not* zugleich die Fülle seiner literarischen und historischen Reminiszenzen ist, sollte mehr Sorgfalt darauf verwenden, diejenigen Parallelen, um derentwillen er ein solches Werk schreibt, zu verdecken. Verstößt er gegen diese *Diskretion*, aus der allein die echte Spannung der Kunst entsteht, so setzt er sich der Gefahr aus, die Aufmerksamkeit seiner Leser nicht selten zu suspendieren. Ein Buch, das den Namen eines Geheimnisses als Titel führt, darf selber nicht ohne *Geheimnis* sein. Ein Rest, der *Schweigen* ist, bestimmt den Rang eines Kunstwerkes. (Emphasis mine)

Both Baumgart and Neumann remark on the surfeit of something so well known that they themselves choose not to name it. Neumann additionally appeals to Hildesheimer's sense of discretion *not* to reveal the secret of this knowledge. Where does Neumann detect parallels to *Tynset*'s historical reminiscences? And why should

¹⁴⁰ Peter Horst Neumann, "Hamlet will schlafen," *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, March 13, 1965. For a discussion of Baumgart's and Neumann's reviews of *Tynset*, cf. Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 302ff.

Hildesheimer refrain from showing parallels already in existence and which allegedly prompted his writing in the first place? To answer these questions and assess the novel's significance for a contemporary theory of melancholia, I now turn to Hildesheimer's melancholic novel. In doing so I pay particular attention to instances in which traumatic memory disrupts the narrator's chain of association and redirects it in a manner that is uncontrollable by the narrator. The agitation of constant memory—hypermnnesia—is a characteristic common to both melancholia and trauma, and it constitutes an important link between them.

“Das Entsetzliche leuchtet auf:” Traumatic Memory

The structure of *Tynset*—the framing story of the narrator's insomnia in a single night and embedded narratives telling of a multitude of people who lived at different times—makes it counterproductive to speak of a plot. Jonathan J. Long remarks that “[t]he curious thing about (...) *Tynset* (...) is that not a great deal happens.”¹⁴¹ On the surface, the novel tells of a middle-aged insomniac who lives in a mountainous region in a house he shares with his housekeeper. The narrator is in the herb business, presumably selling herbal mixtures to customers in Germany, where he once lived. While Celestina, the housekeeper, spends her nights in alcohol-induced stupor, the narrator wanders through different rooms in his house to contemplate the history of objects contained within them. Not only objects but also sounds the narrator perceives serve him as catalysts for the histories he either remembers or imagines for them. The sound of a village rooster reminds the narrator of “die Hähne Attikas,” shorthand for his memory of the Acropolis in Athens, where at one time he incited a chorus of roosters by crying “Kikereki.”¹⁴² Telephoning for the weather report (47-

¹⁴¹ Long, “Time and Narrative,” 457.

¹⁴² Wolfgang Hildesheimer, *Tynset* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1992), 37, 39, 63-70. From now on page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

50), the narrator remembers Wesley B. Prosnicz, who froze to death in his snowbound car (50-55) after he had been to the last of the narrator's parties and attempted to proselytize his guests, an activity for which he had almost been murdered by the party's angry mob (160-173). The narrator owns two beds, one winter and one summer bed. Lying in the winter bed the narrator tells the story of one of its previous owners, Don Carlo Gesualdo, who committed double murder when he found his wife with her lover in bed together (128-130, 237-241). The antique summer bed acts as starting point for a narrative, referred to as bed fugue, of seven travelers who slept in the bed in 1522 and contracted the plague (187-203).¹⁴³ All of these embedded narratives carry associations of decay, death, or even murder.

Coupled to his interest in the history of certain objects and in associations that sounds produce is the narrator's almost obsessive engagement with information encoded by numbers. Periodically the narrator refers to his phone book or to the memory of using phone books in the past, a practice by which he introduces names of people on whom he then reflects. Railroad timetables hold a similar fascination for the narrator. In the timetable of the Norwegian railroad system he notices the town of Tynset, a place he considers for a future journey and to which he returns with great frequency during the course of the night. After the completion of *Tynset*, Hildesheimer remarked that he had intended for his novel "die Rondo-Form," a musical form that describes the alternation between a principal theme and several digressions (or episodes) and in which the principal theme always returns (the predecessor of the form, *ritornello*, derived its name from the verb *ritornare*, Italian for "to return"). Reflections on Tynset recur nineteen times, and after each of his stories the narrator returns to Tynset as the principal theme. The structure of the novel supports

¹⁴³ This list of embedded narratives is far from complete. I merely highlight the four narratives that received the most attention and which I mention again later, albeit in passing. Long's list of embedded narratives in *Tynset* is identical, Long, "Time and Narrative," 457f.

Hildesheimer's description of *Tynset* as rondo, and following Patricia Stanley's analysis of rondo-like qualities of the novel, many commentators have accepted music as one of the conceptual models for *Tynset*.¹⁴⁴

Less obvious than the mention of *Tynset*, albeit much more numerous, are subtly inserted remarks regarding the deaths of people the narrator knew and about those who were responsible for these deaths. It requires attention on the reader's part to join the pieces together and realize that the narrator either is Jewish himself or identifies with Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Remarks concerning his present, for instance in reference to an already outdated newspaper from 1961, are the narrator's commentary on postwar life in West Germany in general and failures of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in particular, a failure that forces the narrator "ein wenig auf[zu]arbeiten" in the Germans' stead (101). The relationship between the narrator, his experiences with Nazi Germany, and postwar German society is almost unintelligible but reveals itself in the manner in which reflective associative chains compulsively switch directions and evoke memories the narrator would prefer to suppress. Fleeting memory fragments reveal that the narrator, if not a victim himself, witnessed the murder of his father and the persecution of a Jewish friend, and the narrator tries to come to terms with these events in the context of postwar Germany.

In what follows I pay particular attention to information the narrator imparts regarding the Nazi past and his position vis-à-vis German postwar society. In doing so I inevitably give the impression that in *Tynset* this information is presented in a straightforward fashion. It must be emphasized that Hildesheimer's approach favors a much more subtle presentation of historically informed knowledge that is often strictly

¹⁴⁴ Patricia Haas Stanley, *Wolfgang Hildesheimers "Tynset"* (Meisenheim: Hain, 1978); Patricia Stanley, "The Structure of Wolfgang Hildesheimer's *Tynset*," *Monatshefte* 71, no. 1 (1979), 29-40. Long provides for a critical reading of reducing the structure of *Tynset* to the rondo form, Long, "Time and Narrative."

associative in style. I translate Hildesheimer's elusive stylistic qualities into precise and certain knowledge for the sake of my argument, even at the risk of bypassing the texture of the novel's style.

In "Antworten über Tynset," a short text published in 1965 to promote the novel, several of Hildesheimer's replies to an imaginary interviewer consider the truth content of *Tynset*. Does Hildesheimer suffer from insomnia? No. Is he identical to his narrator? Not in terms of sleeplessness. Does he grow herbs, like the narrator? Yes. Do the objects *Tynset*'s narrator examines exist? Has Hildesheimer been to the places his narrator describes? And so forth. Responding to the imagined question of what *Tynset* is about—what constitutes the plot or its main theme—Hildesheimer says the following:

Gern: das Hauptthema—das Entsetzliche, verkörpert durch die Straßenlaternen, Kabasta, den Lampenschirm, die Mörder „aus Wien oder aus dem Weserland,“ das Gegenüber im Speisewagen—leuchtet nur auf, es wird nicht ausgeführt, ist nur kurzer Anlass der Nebenthemen. Die Nebenthemen—die verschiedenen Geschichten, Reminiszenzen, Rückblenden—stoßen sich daran ab.¹⁴⁵

The flashing ("aufleuchten") of the horrendous appears relatively minor throughout the text, yet for Hildesheimer it determines the main theme. Because it appears to be marginal and at the same time of such intensity that it possesses determinative force, the flashing of "das Entsetzliche" mirrors the *modus operandi* of traumatic memories. As Benjamin has argued, some moments in time flash up but disappear before we can make sense of them, and therefore the coherence of memory depends on embedding those flashbulb moments into a greater narrative that keeps them from remaining statically fixed, like isolated photographs.¹⁴⁶ Trauma theory has established the need

¹⁴⁵ Wolfgang Hildesheimer, "Antworten über Tynset," in *Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Gesammelte Werke in sieben Bänden. Bd. II, Monologische Prosa*, ed. Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig and Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 384-87, here 385.

¹⁴⁶ On the flashing of history, cf. Benjamin, "Concept of History," 390f.

for embedment strategies for trauma victims to cope with traumatic experiences that, unless they are worked through, remain isolated *Erlebnisse* and do not become integrated *Erfahrung*. It is the *Erfahrung* of loss that makes mourning possible; faced with *Erlebnis* alone, victims of loss may be trapped in endless melancholia.¹⁴⁷ In Tynset “Nebenthemen” and “das Entsetzliche” provoke one another, however, there is no causal relationship that helps to integrate memories of horror into a coherent narrative that would allow the narrator to make sense of his past. While the narrator’s efforts at storytelling speak of his desire—perhaps even his need—to turn events into narratives and, consequently, to experience (*erfahren*) these events within the larger context of his history, he cannot process memories of cruelties and persecution, which

¹⁴⁷ Dominick LaCapra correlates the processes of acting out and working through with Benjamin’s notion of *Erfahrung/Erlebnis*: “Trauma and its post-traumatic acting [out], reliving, or reenactment are modes of *Erlebnis*-‘experience’ that is often radically disorienting and chaotic. Working through is a mode of *Erfahrung* which need not be seen in stereotypically Hegelian terms as implying full dialectical transcendence or narrative closure,” Dominick LaCapra, “Writing History, Writing Trauma,” in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 1-42, here 22n28. Elsewhere LaCapra provides a useful definition of trauma, which summarizes the findings of trauma theory as well as offering LaCapra’s own critical intervention: “In traumatic memory the event somehow registers and may actually be relived in the present, at times in a compulsively repetitive manner. It may not be subject to controlled, conscious recall. But it returns in nightmares, flashbacks, anxiety attacks, and other forms of intrusively repetitive behavior characteristic of an all-compelling frame. Traumatic memory (at least in Freud’s account) may involve belated temporality and a period of latency between a real or fantasized early event and a later one that somehow recalls it and triggers renewed repression of foreclosure and intrusive behavior. But when the past in uncontrollably relived, it is as if there were no difference between it and the present. Whether or not the past is reenacted or repeated in its precise literality, one feels as if one were back there reliving the event, and distance between here and there, then and now, collapses. To use Heidegger’s term, one might perhaps refer to traumatic *Dasein* as experientially being back there, anxiously reliving in its immediacy something that was a shattering experience for which one was not prepared—for which one did not have, in Freud’s terms, *Angstbereitschaft* (the readiness to feel anxiety). Traumatic *Dasein* haunts or possesses the self, is acted out or compulsively repeated, and may not be adequately symbolized or accessible in language, at least in any critically mediated, controlled, self-reflexive manner. Words may be uttered but seem to repeat what was said then and function as speech acts wherein speech itself is possessed or haunted by the past and acts as a reenactment or an acting out. When the past becomes accessible to recall in memory, and when language functions to provide some measure of conscious control, critical distance, and perspective, one has begun the arduous process of working over and through the trauma in a fashion that may never bring full transcendence of acting out (or being haunted by revenants and reliving the past in its shattering intensity) but which may enable processes of judgment and at least limited liability and ethically responsible agency. These processes are crucial for laying ghosts to rest, distancing oneself from haunting revenants, renewing an interest in life, and being able to engage memory in more critically tested senses,” Dominick LaCapra, “Holocaust Testimonies. Attending to the Victim’s Voice,” in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 86-113, here 89f.

confront him as flashing, static imprints. The memory of the narrator is structured like a labyrinthine web in which not linear narrative but compulsive associations force single flashbulb images into his consciousness. Words and names such as “Straßenlaternen,” “Kabasta,” “Lampenschirm,” “Wien oder Weserland,” and “Speisewagen” become shorthand for particular chains of memory associations pointing to crimes committed by Nazis, which are irreconcilable with narrative memory, and thus the narrator recalls them only partially and without establishing a context for them. By the light of street lamps seventeen inhabitants of the Norwegian town of Hamar were killed by a German commandant “im letzten Krieg,” readers learn from an isolated memory that flashes up while the narrator browses through his Norwegian railroad timetable (18f.). Kabasta is the murderer of the narrator’s acquaintance, Bloch (63), yet when the narrator telephones Kabasta and chooses “Bloch” as his alias, he does so without knowing why: “dieser Name fiel mir grade ein, er bedeutete mir nichts” (44). Walking through his dark house and touching the surfaces of objects within it, the narrator is suddenly reminded of a lampshade “aus heller menschlicher Haut, gefertigt in Deutschland von einem deutschen Bastler, der heute als Pensionär in Schleswig-Holstein lebt,” but he cannot recall where or whether he has seen it (139). He says nothing about his father except that he had been murdered by Christian family men from Vienna and Weserland, but he offers no explanation of the circumstances of the killing (156). While the narrator mentally revises orders for his herb business, the thought of the German dislike for strong spices conjures up the image of a bulky man in a dining car who removed hipbones from Danish prisoners during the war (246). These sorts of references to Nazi crimes are subtly woven into the fabric of the entire text.

Hildesheimer’s explicit list of “das Entsetzliche” is short and incomplete. In *Tynset* readers encounter, for instance, a flashing memory of Bloch’s wife, Doris

Wiener, who died in “einer Gaskammer” (63). The narrator remembers the name of the company that engineered the gas chamber—“an Firmennamen erinnere ich mich unfehlbar und genau”—but how well does he remember the victim? He thinks of her in terms of her cosmetically altered nose and associates her with Karl Mädler, who changed his name to Roland Fleming (61f). Although in Nazi propaganda “Namen und (...) Nasen” (70) were indicators of Jewishness, the narrator fails to make an explicit connection between Jewish victims and Nazi perpetrators, a connection the careful reader does not miss. The reader’s suspicion that the narrator himself fell victim to Nazi persecution or identifies with its Jewish victims is confirmed, albeit not fully and only halfway into the book, when the narrator refers to himself as belonging in the “Judengasse” located near “Adolph-Platz” (118f.). Knowledge of the narrator’s Jewish identity helps to decipher the ending of the Hamar episode. In that reflection on a wartime memory, the narrator writes:

Es ist spät. Ich will versuchen zu schlafen, aber irgend etwas hat mich aufgestört, ich habe schon vergessen, was es war, und ich will versuchen, mich nicht daran zu erinnern; ich will versuchen, sanft in andere Bahnen zu gleiten, an anderes zu denken, ich will hoffen, dass dieses andere nicht auch etwas Verstecktes enthält, das mich aufstört.
(19)

Directly following the description of a murderous event, the notion that the narrator no longer remembers what it was that disturbed his sleep is disquieting. Precisely because the narrator is a Jewish witness of the Holocaust who suffers from multiple losses, every memory poses the danger of including something hidden, static, irresolvable, and so he desires not to remember at all. “[D]er Ich-Erzähler,” Hildesheimer said in an interview more than twenty years after the publication of *Tynset*, adding “wenn man so will, ich als Wolfgang Hildesheimer,” wants to forget “das Schreckliche, das Furchtbare (...). Und immer wenn dieses Thema, wenn die furchtbare Gegenwart oder

die furchtbare Vergangenheit näher heranrücken (...) werden sie wieder abgestoßen, und er [=der Ich-Erzähler] erzählt sich eine neue Geschichte.”¹⁴⁸

In an article on Jean Améry Sebald once empathically described a peculiar mode of traumatic memory in which “Inseln der Amnesie” coexist with “einer ans Pathologische grenzenden Hypermnesie.”¹⁴⁹ The latter results from constant stimulation of past memories “in einer ansonsten ausgeleerten Vergangenheit,” which produces recurring but static flashbulb memories. Hypermnesia leads, Sebald writes, to compulsive repetition of past moments producing death anxiety in the present, while its counterpart, amnesia, brackets out all memories that could help make sense of an original traumatic event and integrate it into the past. Freud argued that trauma occurs when victims of sudden and unforeseeable encounters with danger or death are unable to fend off the shock with “Angstbereitschaft” (the readiness to feel anxiety). In this situation external excitations tear through psychic defenses to flood the psychic apparatus.¹⁵⁰ To bring this excess of stimuli under control (“zu bewältigen”), such excitations must be bound and then discharged. The process of binding and discharging is difficult, however; victims are psychically fixed to the moment of trauma and unconsciously return to it over and again (in order to make up for the lack of original *Angstbereitschaft* and retrospectively prepare for the event), while consciously trying *not* to think of it, but to forget it.¹⁵¹ The unconscious must be made conscious before it can be processed, but the traumatized victim remembers less, and more importantly, does not even remember the essential part (“das Wesentliche”) of

¹⁴⁸ Hildesheimer and Hilrichs, *Ich werde nun schweigen*, 42.

¹⁴⁹ W. G. Sebald, “Mit den Augen eines Nachtvogels. Über Jean Améry,” in *Campo Santo*, ed. Sven Meyer (Munich, Vienna: Hanser, 2003), 149-70, here 153.

¹⁵⁰ Trauma is the breaking through of an otherwise strong barrier against overstimulation by external stimuli, cf. Sigmund Freud, “Jenseits des Lustprinzips,” in *Gesammelte Werke. Bd. 13, Jenseits des Lustprinzips und andere Arbeiten aus den Jahren 1920-1924* (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 1981), 3-69, here 31, 29.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 10f., 32.

the event. She is thus “vielmehr genötigt, das Verdrängte als *gegenwärtiges* Erlebnis zu *wiederholen*, anstatt es, wie der Arzt es lieber sähe, als ein Stück der Vergangenheit zu *erinnern*.”¹⁵² Until this process concludes, the victim of trauma may be unable to agree fully with and believe in the factual reconstruction of the traumatic event but repeatedly act out instead. Traumatic events, which made no sense at the time of their occurrence and received interpretation only belatedly from an external source, cannot be genuinely remembered, and they agitate traumatic memories on behalf of which the victim acts out and repeats.¹⁵³

Traumatized by the deaths of his father, Bloch, and others whom he knew, and perhaps convinced that he, too, had been meant to die (“die Judengasse, wo ich hingehöre,” 118), the narrator in *Tynset* is drawn to images that repeat the sudden shock of life-threatening situations, but at the same time he is unable to remember them. The house in the alpine region, where the narrator seeks refuge while former perpetrators continue to live comfortably in postwar Germany, marks a physical separation of past and present that is not paralleled by any conscious distinction of the two on the part of the narrator. Thus “Schläger [und] Mörder” who disclose their “furchtbare Vergangenheiten” (117) continue to menace the narrator, for instance on a wending drive through the labyrinthine streets of “Wilhelmstadt” (114), a generic term that stands for all German state capitals and perhaps also connotes Nazi government officials who Hildesheimer met during the so-called *Wilhelmstraßenprozess* at the Nuremberg Subsequent Nuremberg.¹⁵⁴ In the narrator’s chthonic world of

¹⁵² Ibid., 16.

¹⁵³ “[T]he patient does not *remember* anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but *acts* it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he *repeats* it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it.” Freud, “Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through,” 15.

¹⁵⁴ Also called the Ministries Trial, this was the eleventh of twelve subsequent trials in Nuremberg, against officials of various Nazi ministries, including the Foreign Office that had been located on Wilhelmstraße in Berlin. Hildesheimer interpreted at this trial, which took place from January 1948 until April 1948. Ernst von Weizsäcker was one of the defendants; his son, Richard von Weizsäcker, served on the defense team and later became federal president of West Germany, in the capacity of

melancholia, the destruction and decay of every Wilhelmstadt is already included. According to the narrator, it is unquestionable that in some future even the city will be “wieder Wüste,” and here his thoughts drift from Wilhelmstadt to the desert.

The topos of the desert is prominent in *Tynset* (even more so in *Masante*, which actually takes place in the desert). Both labyrinth and wasteland generally index melancholic despair in the face of a world filled with secrets and riddles, two additional motifs Hildesheimer frequently employs. The inclusion of the desert in *Tynset* poses one of the most puzzling enigmas of the text. While the image conjures feelings of solitude and despair, the narrator apparently visited the desert in the company of a woman. Yet she remains unidentified. Henry A. Lea is the only critic who has commented, if only in passing, on the role of the woman, who appears on four occasions but of whom the reader learns almost nothing. But Lea errs in stating, “[e]s ist also klar, dass [der Erzähler] sich von ihr getrennt hat, nicht sie sich von ihm.”¹⁵⁵ Precisely because the narrator, who remembers phone numbers and the names of companies to a degree that borders on hypermnesia, does not recall either the physical appearance or, until the very end, the name of the woman and whether or not he loved her, the absence of this woman appears to compromise his psychic stability. The narrator suffers from the loss of this woman, Vanessa, and this unremembered loss is experienced as absence and causes melancholia. With the melancholic disposition in mind, the “Besetzungsprobleme” mentioned in *Tynset* refer, then, not only to the Wagner singer born in and the military occupation of Hamar (18), but also to cathexis.

The narrator experiences the absence of Vanessa, but he cannot make sense of it. The first time the narrator recalls Vanessa, the images of a ship, a pier, and wooden planks cloud the memory of her person. The scene is one of departure, but it is unclear

which he awarded Hildesheimer the Federal Cross of Merit in 1984. Cf. Lea, *Hildesheimers Weg*, 22, 66f.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 235.

who left and who stayed behind. The narrator leaves us with two possibilities, as he in his memory stands simultaneously “auf dem Kai und (...) auf dem Schiff” (74).

Though he recalls the environs in great detail—the name of the ship, the rust of the anchor, the path of the seagulls—Vanessa falls victim to the narrator’s amnesia that accompanies this hypermnesia. The memory of the wind, “in dem wir standen, zu zweit” (74), reappears at a point later in the text, but the narrator actively denounces it as “Täuschung,” repeating the word three times (96). The narrator does not forget landscapes—the backdrops of his life—“nein, diese Dinge vergesse ich nicht” (96), but he cannot recall those with whom he visited these landscapes, including the sea and a labyrinth:

Ich war zu zweit—

—zu zweit? Aber mit wem? Sie hatte eine dunkle Stimme, die sagte: „Komm, es wird dunkel,“ oder: „it’s getting dark“—, oder sagte sie: „fa buio“?—Nein, das sagte sie nicht, ich erinnere mich nicht an ein u, es war ein a, dark—dark—. Welche Farbe hatten ihre Augen: Ich weiß es nicht mehr, ich habe es vergessen wie ihren Namen, ich entsinne mich nur noch der Hintergründe, der Szenerie, die Darsteller sind mir entschwunden, haben sich längst umgekleidet und verwandelt, vielleicht haben sie sich artig und lächelnd vor mir verbeugt, *aber diesen Moment habe ich versäumt*, vielleicht hielt ich die Augen geschlossen in dem Moment. (98, emphasis mine)

Although the narrator blames himself for actively having missed the moment of Vanessa’s disappearance, it is more likely that the working dynamics of trauma disabled him from consciously experiencing (*erfahren*) and thereby knowing the event.

Vanessa and the narrator feel growing anxiety in a labyrinth they visit at Villa Barbarigo. Each has the impression of seeing the other for the first time, and this disorienting experience may signify that, threatened by the danger of separation in the labyrinth, both finally realize the danger posed by barbaric German places such as the

labyrinthine Wilhelmstadt (253). But the narrator cannot infer this meaning from his memories (253). At the end of the novel, on the morning following his sleepless night, the narrator suddenly recalls the woman's name and his feelings for her:

Jetzt fällt es mir ein: Vanessa hieß sie. Vanessa, ein guter Name. Und ich muss sie geliebt haben. Ich erinnere mich—
ich erinnere mich, dass ich mich manchmal nachts im Dunkel, in jähher lähmender Angst um ihr Leben, über die Schlafende neigte, um zu horchen ob sie noch atme.
Ob sie noch atmet? (sic, 267f.)

The narrator's memory of his companion's name makes the search for Tynset superfluous. Tynset is "hinfällig" (268). It no longer poses an enigma that busies the narrator at night. Tynset "entschwinde[t] (...) wie ein letzter Atemzug" (269), but the riddle of Vanessa—if she still breathes and, therefore, is alive—returns to occupy the narrator.

Tynset = Tyskland + Hamlet

The narrator yearns for protection by inanimate, concrete objects that anchor his thoughts, preferably phonebooks and train schedules, which are books "voller gedrängter Wiedergabe, nirgends [begeben sie] sich auf den Boden der Spekulation" (28). Nevertheless, the dense timetable of the Norwegian railroad feeds his imagination with place names and arrival times, registering an alternative time and space to which the narrator repairs during his nights without sleep. This alternative reality, however, is not without threatening elements. On one of his ritualistic mental journeys, the narrator discovers Tynset, "diese Nebenstation an der Nebenlinie zwischen Hamar und Stören" (55, cf. 13). The narrator is less than fascinated with the actual city of Tynset in Norway (which disappointed Hildesheimer once he visited it

after the completion of *Tynset*¹⁵⁶), but he displays a curious interest in the letter “y” in the virtual city’s name. Much like the *Nebenlinien* of the railroad system, the “y” occupies an in-between space that demands attention. The passage in which the narrator articulates the letter’s allure has profound importance for understanding the narrator’s mindset and the overall thrust of Hildesheimer’s melancholic text:

Tynset. Das klingt nach (...) Tynset, daran bin ich im Vorbeigehen haften geblieben, dieses Wort umkreisen meine Gedanken, sie kreisen es ein. Dieses Ypsilon! Indem es schräg nach links unter die Zeile ragt und daher zwischen den Zeilen steht, hat es einen Fang ausgestreckt, an dem die Fetzen der Gedanken, müde und in wachsendem Maße bereit, ein Hindernis wahrzunehmen, ja, es sogar willkommen zu heißen, sich weit aufgerissen und hängen geblieben sind.

Dabei ist dieses Ypsilon noch nicht einmal recht aussprechbar. Oder zumindest: es ist Sache des Zufalls, ob dem Mund die Stellung gelingt, um der Stimme den Laut zu erlauben. Das, neben seiner Schräge, hebt das Ypsilon von allen anderen Buchstaben ab, macht es zu einer trügerischen Komponente inmitten lapidarer Tatsachen. Da liegt es denn, auf dem Weg zwischen I und Ü, liegt genau auf der Mitte, aber das Ü selbst liegt auf der Mitte eines Weges, es liegt auf der Hälfte des doppelt so langen Weges von I zu U. Die zweite Hälfte dieses Weges, die Strecke von Ü zu U, hat keine Mitte, hat kein Zeichen, das sie markiert. Hier liegt nichts, liegt Schweigen, liegt, im wahren Sinne des Wortes, das Unausprechliche, hier beginnt es, in diesen unscheinbaren Dingen tritt es plötzlich hervor, um dann in den scheinbaren ins Unermeßliche anzuwachsen, ins Entsetzliche. (25ff.)

The letter “y” has extended its hook, dangling between the lines in an indeterminate space void of language but nonetheless marked by writing, and the narrator, who was just passing by, is snared as its first catch. Now that he is on the hook, so to speak, his thoughts become the next “Fang,” but only the unarticulated and incoherent tatters of those thoughts. Because of the narrator’s somnolence, his defenses are lowered and his attempts to forget are weakened, so the hook finds easy prey. Moreover, the narrator’s drifting thoughts *welcome* the barrier the hook presents, and here the text hints at the

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Hildesheimer and Hillrichs, *Ich werde nun schweigen*, 45.

narrator's compulsive behavior. His traumatic memories, involuntarily thrust into the light by the compulsion to repeat, are caught in the hook of the "y"; the process indexes associative memory work that resists narrative embedding. The "y" stands in for unpredictable origins and associative chains, for it is itself unpronounceable and unspeakable. The phonetic undecidability forces its articulator to attend to a silence from which "Entsetzliche[s]" accelerates and accumulates ad infinitum.

The name Tynset, home to this "y," is not accidental. It recalls "Tyskland," as Germany is known in Norway (as well as in Sweden and Denmark). The unspeakable hook that catches the horrendous is a German hook. "Denk ich an Tynset in der Nacht," as several critics entitled their reviews of *Tynset*,¹⁵⁷ should thus read more correctly as "Denk ich an Deutschland in der Nacht." The famous opening line of Heinrich Heine's 1843 poem "Nachtgedanken," followed by the lines "Dann bin ich um den Schlaf gebracht / Ich kann nicht mehr die Augen schließen / Und meine heißen Thränen fließen,"¹⁵⁸ has often been construed as an example of Heine's political poetry. Written in the pre-revolutionary atmosphere of the 1840s and after Heine had already been in exile in Paris for twelve years, the first and final stanzas (in which the French wife dispels the "deutschen Sorgen" of yet another insomniac) are interpreted as the poet's criticism of German *Kleinstaaterei* and censorship. Most of the poem (stanzas 2-7) concerns the author's fear of not seeing his aging mother again before her death. Vis-à-vis Hildesheimer's *Tynset*, the central concern of Heine's "Nachtgedanken" is expressed in the two stanzas not yet mentioned (8 and 9):

Seit ich das Land verlassen hab'
 So viele sanken dort in's Grab,
 Die ich geliebt—wenn ich sie zähle,
 So will verbluten meine Seele.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Schonauer, "Denk ich an Tynset in der Nacht"; Urs Jenny, "Denk ich an Tynset in der Nacht," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 6/7, 1965.

¹⁵⁸ Heinrich Heine, *Heinrich Heine, Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke. Bd. 2, Neue Gedichte*, ed. Elisabeth Genton (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1983), 129.

Und zählen muss ich—Mit der Zahl
Schwillt immer höher meine Qual,
Mir ist als wälzten sich die Leichen
Auf meine Brust—Gottlob! sie weichen!

The reason for sleeplessness and tears in “Nachtgedanken” is Heine’s mourning of the deaths that occurred in the twelve years of his exile, much as the narrator in *Tynset* mourns the deaths of the twelve years during which Hildesheimer was exiled. The corpses weigh heavily on the minds of Hildesheimer’s narrator as well as Heine’s lyrical I, but in the case of Heine’s poem they disappear as daylight nears (“Gottlob! sie weichen! // Gottlob! durch mein Fenster bricht / Französisch heit’res Tageslicht”). In the aftermath of the Holocaust, the weight of the dead is not as easily shaken. The comparison of “Nachtgedanken” and *Tynset* is not based on the titles of *Tynset* reviews; Hildesheimer’s affiliation with Heine and the importance he ascribed to “Nachtgedanken” is evidenced in the guestbook of a small literary society in Southern Germany, in which Hildesheimer left the message: “Denk ich an Deutschland in der Nacht, dann bin ich um den Schlaf gebracht.” He added, “Und verzeihen Sie, dass ich nichts anderes schreiben kann.”¹⁵⁹ Visiting Germany on professional business, Hildesheimer cannot but think of those who died at the hand of Germans; he cannot but think of *Entsetzliches* that permeates past and present and is caught by the “y” of *Tynset*.

If the name *Tynset* recalls in its first syllable Tyskland, its second syllable bears resemblance to that of Hamlet.¹⁶⁰ Hamlet was Hildesheimer’s “ständiger Begleiter, ein guter Gesell” and his “Lieblingsfigur” already during his school years in

¹⁵⁹ Qtd. in: Domin, “Denk ich an Deutschland,” 124.

¹⁶⁰ “*Tynset*—klingt das nicht wie Hamlet? Ja, es klingt wie Hamlet,” Hildesheimer, *Tynset*, 155.

Germany.¹⁶¹ Interviewed about *Tynset*, Hildesheimer said that his fascination with Hamlet, the most famous tragic insomniac, was “sein sehr stark gebrochenes Verhältnis zur Realität, und sein Zögern, das Zaudern.” He added, “So sehe ich mich selbst ein wenig, auch immer beherrscht von einem gewissen Schuldgefühl, dass ich nicht aktiv eingreife, und darin besteht meine Identifikation mit Hamlet.”¹⁶² Elsewhere Hildesheimer identifies Hamlet as the quintessential melancholic character because Hamlet’s world—as opposed to that of Jacques, another of Shakespeare’s melancholics —“ist in der Tat furchtbar, und er kann sie mit einer besseren vergleichen, die er noch gekannt hat.”¹⁶³ Herein lies the similarity between Hamlet and the narrator, a likeness that stems from the shared experience of having lost one’s father to murder. The ghost of Hamlet’s father—he appears to the narrator because he is “dry,” that is, of melancholic disposition¹⁶⁴—demands that the narrator avenge his father’s death as well as his own, which Hamlet himself was incapable of doing. But the narrator refuses to answer Hamlet’s father; his own father “war anders—mein Vater war ein besserer Mann (...), er hält nicht (...) nach Möglichkeiten einer Rache Ausschau, obgleich sein Ende nicht so sanft war wie das Ende dieses Mannes hier, nein, kein Gift bei einem Nachmittagsnickerchen ins Ohr geträufelt, er ist nicht sanft ins Jenseits hinübergeschlummert,” instead, he was “erschlagen von christlichen Familienvätern” (156). In *Vergebliche Aufzeichnungen*, a text that precedes *Tynset* by three years, Hildesheimer sowed the seeds of this episode, referring to the poisoning of

¹⁶¹ Hildesheimer, “Antworten über Tynset,” 386; Jens, “Hamlet. Das Genie der Poeten,” 109. Cf. Geno Hartlaub, “Tynset ist keine Endstation. Gespräch mit Wolfgang Hildesheimer,” *Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt*, February 20, 1967.

¹⁶² Hildesheimer and Hilrichs, *Ich werde nun schweigen*, 47f.

¹⁶³ Wolfgang Hildesheimer, “Büchners atemlose Melancholie. Zur Verleihung des Georg-Büchner-Preises,” in *Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Gesammelte Werke in sieben Bänden. Bd. VII, Vermischte Schriften*, ed. Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig and Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 31-42, here 38f.

¹⁶⁴ “Geister beschränken ihr Wirken auf das Gebiet des Trockenen,” Wolfgang Hildesheimer, “Vergebliche Aufzeichnungen,” in *Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Gesammelte Werke. Bd. I, Erzählende Prosa*, ed. Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig and Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 273-302, here 277. In the teachings of the four humors, black bile is associated with dryness.

Hamlet's father as mere hearsay. The true cause of his death may be the starting point for a story "von dem tragischsten Nachtwandler aller Zeiten," but in *Aufzeichnungen* Hildesheimer is not yet ready to follow this "Ansatzpunkt."¹⁶⁵ When he does so in *Tynset*, not Hamlet's father but the narrator takes the role of the sleepwalker. The cause of death for Hamlet's father is accepted, and so is the father's demand for revenge. Hamlet's father seeks to avenge his own murder and the murder of the narrator's father (20, 186). But despite the narrator's identification with Hamlet, the narrator does not seek to punish his father's murderers: "ich verzichte, ich handele nicht, andere handeln, ich nicht" (107). This passage was profoundly misinterpreted in the reception of *Tynset*; Gunter Schäble, for instance, who prefaces his observation that the narrator had made "einmal eine furchtbare Erfahrung" with a distinct "vielleicht," thus questioning the authenticity of the narrator's experience, reads him as a man who seeks revenge. "Hamlets unmögliche Rache"—so the title of Schäble's review—is, according to Schäble, the narrator's impossible revenge, impossible not because the narrator is reluctant to act, but because "er konnte nicht ein ganzes Volk erdolchen."¹⁶⁶ The narrator's melancholic inertia—his inaction—and his rejection of the entire concept of revenge is framed here as a *logistic inability* to avenge mass murder and genocide.

The narrator explains his refusal to act—whether in revenge or otherwise—differently. Surprisingly, he connects this with guilt. He explains his inaction by pointing to his innocence. According to him, action ("Handlung") is primarily necessary as reaction, that is, after one has become guilty of something for which one must then take responsibility. Action is responsibility; it is the responsibility to make amends and to acquit oneself of guilt: "ich bin ohne Schuld—besser vielleicht,

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 301.

¹⁶⁶ Gunter Schäble, "Hamlets unmögliche Rache," *Tagesspiegel*, May 1/2, 1965. Qtd. in: Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 308ff.

vorsichtiger gesagt: ohne wesentliche Schuld—, daher auch ohne Pflicht. Ich habe nichts gutmachen, nichts reinzuwaschen, jedenfalls wüsste ich nicht was” (99). *Handlung* is demanded of the perpetrators, not of the narrator! The narrator does not identify as victim, but he is sure that he is not a perpetrator. Or is he? To his assurances of his own guiltlessness he adds, „[n]iemand hat, soweit ich weiß, durch mich gelitten.“ The sentence somewhat undermines the credibility of the narrator’s innocence; the repeated notion of his innocence throughout the text—“ich trage selbst wenig eigene Schuld, sehr wenig” (24)—is suspicious and discloses his feeling of survivor guilt. Moreover, the narrator undermines his testimony of innocence at other points of the text, for instance, by expressing a desire to be free from the burden of guilt (51). The randomness of surviving Nazi persecution contrasts with the causality that associates responsibility with agency. Survivor guilt is destructive because it blames the survivor for taking no responsibility when the survivor had no agency. The many recurrences of the word *Schuld*, in twenty different contexts, speak to Hildesheimer’s departure from the “post-1945 Jasperian concept of (...) guilt”; guilt is in *Tynset* an all-encompassing “attitude which does not lead to atonement and transformations, but only to destructive desire for (...) self abasement (...) and, ultimately, more misery.”¹⁶⁷ Guilt is an important theme in the book—perhaps the most important beside the work of remembering the Nazi past. It is irrelevant whether the narrator’s guilt is imagined or real; the unconscious conviction that he unjustly survived his father and perhaps Vanessa creates a powerful sentiment of guilt that forms the subtext of *Tynset*. The particular form of guilt he feels leaves him unable to act decisively in the present.

¹⁶⁷ Giles R. Hoyt, "Guilt in Absurdity. Wolfgang Hildesheimer's *Tynset*," *Seminar* 14, no. 2 (1978), 123-40, here 130.

The Work of Melancholia

The narrator's attention to the town of Tynset, a minor town located along a secondary rail route, emphasizes Hildesheimer's insistence on the "Nebenthemen" in *Tynset*. The "Nebenlinie" Hamar-Stören, recalling the German verb for disturb, *stören*, leads to the "Nebenthemen," and because it draws a wide arc (93), these embedded narratives have nothing apparent to do with the horrors of the Nazi past. Some of the early scholarship on *Tynset* focuses almost exclusively on these stories; especially the narratives known as "Bettfuge" and "die Hähne Attikas," and the Prosniczner and Gesualdo episodes have drawn much attention.¹⁶⁸ The embedded narratives point more generally towards death, decay, and disintegration throughout history, much in the fashion of Benjamin and in the novels of Sebald a few decades later. *Entsetzliches* hovers beneath all so-called civilization. Notable is Hildesheimer's fascination, or perhaps obsession, with the railway system, which immediately conjures up connections to the use of the railroad during the Holocaust.

The narrative technique Hildesheimer employed reproduces the compulsive nature of traumatic memory outlined above. While the narrator drifts off, reminiscing about a past with which the reader becomes acquainted only in intervals, he repeatedly returns to Tynset: out of the eighty-odd distinct thematic breaks within the text, references to Tynset account for nineteen ruptures. The interlocking of the framing story—to which all references to Tynset belong—and the embedded narratives imitate memory's intimate linkage with the present: *Entsetzliches* erupts into the present regardless of the linear progression of time, which is thus experienced as fragmented and incoherent. In an article on *Tynset*, Jonathan J. Long contests earlier arguments that ignore the temporal nature of the text or reduce it to an "a-historical concept of

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Gerhard F. Probst, "Die Kategorien von Zeit und Raum und das Steigern von Realität. Wolfgang Hildesheimers *Tynset*," *Archiv* 215 (1978), 272-80.

time,” by proposing an understanding that “pits linear progression against cyclical return.”¹⁶⁹ Because Long defines cyclicity within the framework of recurring natural phenomena and the liturgical calendar (in reference to *Masante*), he unfortunately subsumes the repetition of certain motifs under an order that accounts poorly for the pattern of memory. The concept of cyclicity is productive only if its movements are not reduced to cycles that are identical in their temporality, such as the changes of the season. The narrative cycles concentrated about the thought and memory complex *Tynset* are of varying circumference, mimicking the “Ring[e] des Saturn” (177) and indexing the psychological disposition of the melancholic narrator, who cannot finish the work of mourning and remains trapped in cyclical melancholia. Hildesheimer’s frequent inclusion of rings and circles (e.g., 39) speaks to the multitude of Saturnine rings that are formally represented by the varying lengths and structures of the embedded narratives. For instance, the scenes of the roosters of Attica and the bed fugue are narrated almost uninterruptedly; other motifs, such as the invocation of Hamlet’s father, are called upon with great frequency, without, however, building up to a coherent narrative. Thus Hildesheimer’s structural and stylistic choices identify *Tynset* as a project of melancholia and melancholic memory.

Albeit not obvious initially, the largest cluster of thematic references concerns memory. The narrator’s exclamation (one of few in the text), “Sinnlose Erinnerung!” (36) speaks to the frustration caused by the inability to make sense of memory. He would prefer to ignore this “unsichtbare(s) Irrlicht” of memory that mocks and confronts him with death and decay (52): “Erinnerungen (...) ziehen mir scheinheilig entgegen, ich nehme sie auf, und plötzlich enthüllen sie einen *entsetzlichen* Kern, angesichts dessen Grinsen der Schlaf entflieht” (126, emphasis mine). The destructive nature of his melancholic memory, which is in part traumatic, causes the narrator to

¹⁶⁹ Long, “Time and Narrative,” 461, 63.

long for a nothing that is different from philosophical Nothingness. He reflects upon the former while he is at the highest point of his house, using a telescope to escape into the universe:

Mit “Nichts” meine ich nicht das modische Etwas, genannt Nichts, das sogenannte “absolute Nichts”, voll von unerträglichem Pathos, das unbestimmbare, dehnbare Nichts der Philosophen, Thema lebloser Gespräche am runden Tisch, im schalltoten fensterlosen Raum, strapaziert, aufgebläht, ein Ballon voller Nichts, und nur „Nichts“ genannt, weil nichts Besseres darauf passt, die Nichtung oder Nichtigkeit alles Seienden, deren Walten mich nichts angeht und nur ihre Verwalter interessiert—nein: ich meine das geographische Nichts, den leeren Raum zwischen Bündeln, den Mengen, den Gruppen von etwas, von viel oder von zuviel, das Unsichtbare zwischen dem Sichtbaren, das Loch im Himmel, das große Rohr, das meine Sehnsucht in den Himmel bohrt, das Verlangen, (...) Verlangen nach einem Ort, an dem nichts ist und nichts sein kann und nie etwas gewesen ist, das treibt mich hinauf, seinethalben schlage ich Wurzeln hier, älter als die des Instruments, so alt wie die der ersten Sterngucker. (...) Nichts ist das, wo Zwischenraum ist und sonst nichts. (180f.)

Once each night, the narrator visits his telescope, which is too old and too simple to penetrate the depths of the universe, but which allows at least for a view “tief genug für den Ring des Saturn” (177), and which pushes

tief in die unendliche Vergangenheit, hier gleichbedeutend mit unendlicher Zukunft, und immer gezogen von meiner Sehnsucht, nirgends zu sein, dorthin, wo kein Stern, kein Licht mehr sichtbar ist, wo nichts ist, wo nichts vergessen wird, *weil nichts erinnert wird*, wo Nacht ist, wo nichts ist, nichts, Nichts. Dorthin— (185f., emphasis mine)

His search for the existence of a “Zwischenraum” is motivated by the narrator’s desire to shut off all memories. Due to his impaired memory, he is unable to locate his identity in a meaningful way. Because psychological processes of remembering and working through circulate in the text, but are not contained in the narrator’s understanding of his own psyche, he suffers from difficulties discerning himself in the

world. The narrator is dislocated; he is in-the-world and outside it (“ich war innen und außen,” 98), he experiences and remains outside experiences (“ich bin im Bild und ich bin nicht im Bild, ich betrachte es von außen,” 74). Torn between belonging and not belonging, he seeks a geographical nothing as a “Zwischenraum” to collapse this dichotomy. Staring into the universe and searching for geographical nothingness reflects the narrator’s ideal of an absolute absence of light, which is, moreover, articulated by his admiration for an entirely black painting (87). The desire for nothing is the only operating drive working in the narrator; he prefers the space of nothing to the constant agitation of memory.

In a similar vein, the narrator abstains from any form of communication with the outer world. Long ago his house was filled with guests, but the last of the parties he hosted ended disastrously in the near-murder of American evangelist Prosniczner (160-172). Since then, no one has entered the narrator’s house, and he does not leave it. His means of transportation are gone; the car that helped him cross the mountain pass broke down and froze, like that of Prosniczner, and will remain this way for eternity (51f., 54f.). Celestina, the housekeeper, and the narrator do not interact. After “die große Krise in unserer Beziehung,” brought about by Celestina’s suspicion that the narrator had supernatural powers, silence dominates their decade-long relationship (242). Only three possible channels of communication are left to the narrator, and because they are inanimate objects, they only *appear* to allow the narrator access to the outside world. He reads the phone book without using the phone; he considers the train schedule without riding the train; and he watches the movement of the sky with his telescope, focusing, however, on black, empty spots. His means of communication are dead ends. Where interaction with people fails, he converses with ghosts (e.g., Hamlet). Surprisingly, the sleepless night ends with the hopeful, concrete intention of leaving the house and joining the village community in mourning the death of a

villager's child (263f.). At the memory of Vanessa's name, however, this plan is quickly abandoned, and the narrator is drawn back into his past that blocks participation in the present. The narrator does *not* leave his bed, and *Tynset* ends with the following description of the narrator:

in diesem Bett der Winternächte, der Mondnächte und der dunklen
Nächte, in dem ich nun wieder liege, tief gebettet, obgleich es Tage ist,
liege und für immer liegenbleibe und Tynset entschwinden lasse—, ich
sehe es dort hinten entschwinden, es ist wieder weit weg, jetzt ist es
entschwunden, der Name vergessen, verweht wie Schall und Rauch,
wie ein letzter Atemzug—

The Ethics of Melancholic Writing

Tynset does not have a happy ending. The narrator does not leave his bed, let alone his house; he avoids contact with his housekeeper as much as the outside world. How can we say that his melancholic remembrance serves nonetheless as a precursor to socio-political action? Blamberger's critical comparison between the work of Hildesheimer and Grass concluded that Grass's melancholic work promoted political involvement via the utopian message of his texts. By contrast, Blamberger argued, Hildesheimer's prose worked not for but against the improvement of society.

Sebald Reads Grass and Hildesheimer

In a comparative study of Hildesheimer and Grass published just prior to Blamberger's, W. G. Sebald arrived at a radically different conclusion. Reading Hildesheimer's *Tynset* and Grass's *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke*, Sebald looks for evidence of genuinely performed "Trauer" to examine whether the deficit of mourning for the victims of the Nazi regime, which the Mitscherlichs diagnosed for West German society, was present in literature. He concludes that with few exceptions literary authors practiced "political apathy" until the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials and

the victory of the Social Democrats in 1969 brought about a change in the cultural-political climate.¹⁷⁰ Once he notes a perceivable shift provoked by the 1960s, Sebald distinguishes between authentic and inauthentic mourning, accusing Grass of the latter.

Grass's *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke* (1972) documents the author's engagement for the Social Democrats on the campaign trail in a pedagogical effort to educate the disillusioned generation of 1968. Embedded into the diary is the history of the Danzig Jews under the Nazi regime; through the fictional Danzig schoolteacher Zweifel, who refuses to participate in the persecution of the Jews, Grass tells his children the story of "Danziger (...) Juden als Mitbürger und Mitmenschen und nicht nur als ein nebuloses Kollektiv."¹⁷¹ It is through this dimension of concrete "Eingedenken(s)," together with Grass's reflections on melancholia that he undertakes as part of a third narrative strand (in connection with preparing for a lecture for the *Dürerjahr* celebrations in 1971), that *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke* gains substance.¹⁷² Through the figure of Zweifel, Grass puts the past in touch with the present, urging his audience—the young generation—to adopt a doubtful attitude towards political power and governance and, perhaps, to exercise melancholic remembrance of Holocaust victims. It was his experience as a member of the Hitler Youth and—as we know today—the Waffen-SS that prompted Grass to warn the youth of the dangers of political ignorance.¹⁷³ Despite Grass's ambitious intention,

¹⁷⁰ Cf. W. G. Sebald, "Konstruktionen der Trauer. Günter Grass und Wolfgang Hildesheimer," in *Campo Santo*, ed. Sven Meyer (Munich, Vienna: 2003), 101-27, here 108. Hans Erich Nossack's 1948 *Der Untergang* marks an exception. Sebald also names Peter Weiss's *Die Ermittlung* and Heinrich Böll's *Frankfurter Vorlesungen*, remarking critically, however, that these works only appeared in the 1960s—that is, much too late. Hans Erich Nossack, *Der Untergang* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1961); Heinrich Böll, *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* (Cologne, Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1966); Peter Weiss, *Die Ermittlung. Oratorium in 11 Gesängen* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1965).

¹⁷¹ Sebald, "Konstruktionen der Trauer," 110.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Cf. Günter Grass, *Schreiben nach Auschwitz. Frankfurter Poetik-Vorlesung* (Frankfurt/M.: Luchterhand, 1990), 33f. The controversial revelation of his Waffen-SS membership became public with his recent autobiography, Günter Grass, *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2006). For a

Sebald criticizes that Grass, who is “in Danziger Dingen sonst so bewandert(en),” was unable to bring to life the memory of the Danzig Jews on his own account but heavily relied on a study conducted by Jewish historian Erwin Lichtenstein. Lichtenstein’s book was published after Grass’s *Tagebuch*, yet in the preface Lichtenstein writes that much of Grass’s information on the Danzig Jews was based on material provided by Lichtenstein prior to publication. Thus the reader of the *Tagebuch*, Lichtenstein writes, finds “in den die Endzeit der Geschichte der Juden in Danzig nachzeichnenden Kapiteln des Buches von Günter Grass den Niederschlag meiner Informationen.”¹⁷⁴ Sebald concludes from Grass’s practice that, although Grass views himself as a dog sniffing for truth (an image Grass borrows from Benjamin who, in his *Trauerspiel* book, named the dog the heraldic animal for the melancholic intellectual and ponderer), Grass has little interest in researching the “reale(n) Schicksal der verfolgten Juden” himself.¹⁷⁵ Worse still, says Sebald, is the figure of Zweifel, who helps to confirm the widespread belief in the so-called other or good German: the German who did not collaborate with the Nazis but resisted them actively. Although true resistance fighters made up but a small minority of Third Reich society, it was the creation of fictional resistance fighters, Sebald argues, that lent West German literature the reputation of the moral backbone of postwar society. By offering his readers Zweifel as a character with whom to identify, Grass diminishes the need to properly mourn the Danzig Jews: Zweifel is, Sebald concludes, “ein der programmatischen Intention der Trauer entgegenstehendes Alibi.”¹⁷⁶ Rather than mourning the loss of the Danzig Jews

documentation of this controversy, cf. Martin Kölbel, *Ein Buch, ein Bekenntnis. Die Debatte um Günter Grass’ “Beim Häuten der Zwiebel”* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2007).

¹⁷⁴ Erwin Lichtenstein, *Die Juden der freien Stadt Danzig unter der Herrschaft des Nationalsozialismus* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1973), viii. Qtd. in: Sebald, “Konstruktionen der Trauer,” 257n17.

¹⁷⁵ Sebald, “Konstruktionen der Trauer,” 111. For Benjamin’s discussion of the dog as ancient emblem of melancholia, cf. Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, 329-32. The characteristics of the dog—“Spürsinn und (...) Ausdauer des Tieres”—remind of “das Bild des unermüdlichen Forschers und Grüblers” (ibid., 329).

¹⁷⁶ Sebald, “Konstruktionen der Trauer,” 114.

himself, Grass delegates this act to the woman depicted in Dürer's *Melancholia*, that is, to melancholia itself. Grass's reflections on melancholia, Dürer's etching, and the dog-like sniffing of a writer do not, however, amount to an act of mourning. For this reason Sebald accuses Grass of inauthentic mourning: Grass's excursus on melancholia appears to him as "etwas mühselig Konstruiertes, [das] etwas von einer historischen Pflichtübung an sich hat." By contrast, Hildesheimer's *Tynset* seems "aus dem Zentrum der Trauer selber entstanden zu sein."¹⁷⁷

Sebald supports his rejection of Grass's *Tagebuch einer Schnecke* with reasons and examples, but he fails to tell his audience why he much prefers Hildesheimer. He lists evidence of Hildesheimer's use of the discourse of melancholia, and he concludes that *Tynset* speaks to the reader "aus dem festen Haus der Melancholie."¹⁷⁸ Yet it is unclear from Sebald's summary of *Tynset* how Hildesheimer achieves this effect and, more importantly, whether and how this melancholic register causes genuine mourning. Returning to Sebald's introduction regarding German literature in general, it is important to note that what he laments here is the failure of German literature to provoke "einen authentischen Versuch zur Trauer in der *Identifikation* mit den wirklichen Opfern."¹⁷⁹ Only the identification with the victims constitutes an authentic attempt to mourn them, and from this statement it becomes clear that for Sebald the crux of the matter is the process of identification. Recall that for Freud it is identification with the lost object that hampers *Trauerarbeit* and provokes melancholia, that is, dysfunctional mourning. Sebald is thus not concerned with mourning at all, as the title of his essay, "Konstruktionen der Trauer," might suggest, but with melancholia. Following this logic Sebald posits not mourning but melancholia to be the ethically responsible response to past crimes.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 119.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 121.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 106. Emphasis mine.

Melancholia: Transhistorical Register?

Since penning his Hildesheimer essay, Sebald, himself a melancholic, as he confessed frequently,¹⁸⁰ has emerged as the most prominent contemporary practitioner of a melancholic writing style. The “Sebald phenomenon,” as Scott Denham, in the preface to a Sebald reader titled *History—Memory—Trauma*, calls the incredible popularity of Sebald, especially in the Anglo-American world, is based on the German author’s singular position as “the most thoughtful and eloquent writer to approach the specifically German catastrophe of modernity that is murder, exile, loss, and grief.” Denham continues that Sebald “does so with modesty and tact, but incessantly and with a kind of helplessness in the face of the experiences of others.”¹⁸¹ As result there seems to be unanimous consensus that identifies Sebald as the “Musterschüler der Vergangenheitsbewältigung.”¹⁸² Perhaps because of the Sebald phenomenon, promoted by prominent intellectuals like Susan Sontag, James Wood, and Cynthia Ozick and carried out in prestigious literary magazines, the melancholy style is today celebrated as the ethically condign literary response to twentieth-century catastrophes. All too often Sebald’s notion of melancholia as “das Überdenken des sich vollziehenden Unglücks” and “eine Form des Widerstands” has been readily accepted, and among the plethora of studies on Sebald only a few critical voices emerged.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ “Ich bin schon ein Melancholiker. Das ist eine emotionale Disposition.” W. G. Sebald and Sven Siedenberg, “Anatomie der Schwermut. Interview mit W. G. Sebald. Über sein Schreiben und die Schrecken der Geschichte,” in *W. G. Sebald*, ed. Franz Loquai (Eggingen: Isele, 1997), 146-48, here 147. Cf. W. G. Sebald and Marco Poltronieri, “Wie kriegen die Deutschen das auf die Reihe?,” in *W. G. Sebald*, ed. Franz Loquai (Eggingen: Isele, 1997), 138-44, here 142; Michaël Zeeman et al., “Transcript of an Interview Given by Max Sebald,” in *W. G. Sebald. History--Memory--Trauma*, ed. Scott Denham and Mark McCulloh (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 7-20, here 25.

¹⁸¹ Scott Denham, “The Sebald Phenomenon,” in *W. G. Sebald. History--Memory--Trauma*, ed. Scott Denham and Mark McCulloh (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 1-6, here 6.

¹⁸² Ben Hutchinson, *W. G. Sebald. Die dialektische Imagination* (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 2n2. Cf. Anne Parry, “Idioms for the Unrepresentable. Postwar Fiction and the Shoah,” in *The Holocaust and the Text. Speaking the Unspeakable*, ed. Andrew Leak and George Paizis (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 109-24.

¹⁸³ W. G. Sebald, *Beschreibung des Unglücks. Zur österreichischen Literatur von Stifter bis Handke* (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 1994), 12. The literature on Sebald and melancholia is vast and includes: Bettina Mosbach, *Figurationen der Katastrophe. Ästhetische Verfahren in W. G. Sebalds Die Ringe des*

These critics have made important scholarly contributions, however, by challenging the dubious conflation of cultural memory with melancholic mourning and trauma that gained some currency among trauma theorists and proponents of melancholic communities.¹⁸⁴ It is worth examining one study in particular, in which author Mary Cosgrove examines how Sebald's melancholy understanding of history emerges precisely in his reading of Grass and Hildesheimer.¹⁸⁵

Saturn und Austerlitz (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2008), esp. 122-55; Kaufman, "Angels"; Katja Garloff, "Kafka's Crypt. W. G. Sebald and the Melancholy of Modern German Jewish Culture," *The Germanic Review* (2007), 123-140; Michael Niehaus and Claudia Öhlschläger, eds., *W. G. Sebald. Politische Archäologie und melancholische Bastelei* (Berlin: E. Schmidt, 2006). Several of the essays collected in Denham and McCulloh thematize melancholia, most importantly Mark Ilseman, "Going Astray. Melancholy, Natural History, and the Image of Exile in W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*," in *W. G. Sebald. History--Memory--Trauma*, ed. Scott Denham and Mark McCulloh (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 301-14. In addition, see: Peter Morgan, "The Sign of Saturn. Melancholy, Homelessness and Apocalypse in W. G. Sebald's Prose Narratives," *German Life and Letters* 58 (2005), 75-92; Graham Jackman, "Gebranntes Kind? W. G. Sebalds 'Metaphysik der Geschichte'," *German Life and Letters* 57 (2004), 456-71; Anne Fuchs, *Die Schmerzensspuren der Geschichte. Zur Poetik der Erinnerung in W. G. Sebalds Prosa* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2004), esp. 165-205; Sigrid Löffler, "'Melancholie ist eine Form des Widerstands.' Über das Saturnische bei W. G. Sebald und seine Aufhebung in der Schrift," *Text + Kritik* 158 (2003), 103-11; Andreas Huyssen, "On Rewritings and New Beginnings. W. G. Sebald and the Literature about the Luftkrieg," *LiLi* 31 (2001), 72-90; Irene Heidelberger-Leonard, "Melancholie als Widerstand," in *Verleihung des Heine-Preises 2000 der Landeshauptstadt Düsseldorf an W. G. Sebald*, ed. Georg Aehling and Kulturamt der Landeshauptstadt Düsseldorf (Düsseldorf, 2000), 5-16. For an excellent review essay of recent publications on Sebald in general (i.e., not focusing exclusively on melancholia), cf. Richard Sheppard, "Woods, Trees, and the Spaces in Between. A Report on Work Published on W. G. Sebald 2005-2008," *Journal of European Studies* 39, no. 1 (2009), 79-128.

¹⁸⁴ Anne Fuchs, in her study on Sebald's ethics and aesthetics, diagnoses the "geradezu obsessive Beschäftigung mit dem Konzept des geschichtlichen Traumas" and hopes to provide a more differentiated account of Sebald than merely stamping him as "Holocaust-Autor." Fuchs, *Schmerzensspuren der Geschichte*, 17, 12.

¹⁸⁵ Mary Cosgrove, "Melancholy Competitions. W. G. Sebald Reads Günter Grass and Wolfgang Hildesheimer," *German Life and Letters* 59, no. 2 (2006), 217-32. Despite a growing scholarship on intertextuality in Sebald's work and on literary influences, to my knowledge only Cosgrove has critically examined Sebald's Hildesheimer text and firmly established the connection between the two authors. This is surprising: Sebald scholars such as Franz Loquai, editor of the first collection of texts on Sebald in 1997, and Jonathan J. Long, author of an exceptional monograph on Sebald and editor of the Sebald *Companion*, are among the few scholars who have recently contributed to the critical reception of Hildesheimer's work, and who therefore distinguish themselves from the vast majority of German studies scholars by having published on both authors. More interesting is, of course, Sebald's own engagement with Hildesheimer in the "Trauer" text. It is curious that Sebald's interpreters, who frequently emphasize the Freudian concepts of melancholia and mourning, have not yet sufficiently accounted for Sebald's essay and have consequently overlooked what Cosgrove—and I—find to be a striking similarity of the themes the two authors address, and of the melancholy style in which they pursue these topics. Cf. Franz Loquai, ed., *W. G. Sebald* (Eggingen: Isele, 1997); Franz Loquai, "Auf der Suche nach Weite. Zur Prosa Wolfgang Hildesheimers," *Text + Kritik* 89/90 (1986), 45-63; Jonathan J. Long and Anne Whitehead, eds., *W. G. Sebald. A Critical Companion* (Seattle: University

In Sebald's need to identify with the victim to account for the past, Cosgrove detects a tendency that, she argues, he shares with the psychoanalytically influenced branch of trauma theory that interprets all of history as continuous trauma.¹⁸⁶ Likewise, melancholia marks for Sebald a transhistorical register that, while it sets out to explore the past, defies historical explanation. In melancholia and trauma—and here Cosgrove relies on Dominick LaCapra's critique of the transhistorical understanding of trauma—identifiable loss is presented as unidentifiable absence. According to Freud, only an identifiable loss can be mourned. If the lost object remains unknown, the process of mourning is hindered by pathological melancholia. LaCapra warns against positing a loss that occurred in a concrete historical setting (such as the Holocaust) as absence, i.e., as being transhistorical or lying outside historical tenses (past, present, future).¹⁸⁷ "When absence and loss are conflated," LaCapra continues, "melancholic paralysis (...) may set in." His concern is that the melancholic response to absence leads to the generalization of a historical loss and invites everyone to identify as victim in the context in which all history is trauma.¹⁸⁸ This constellation does not allow for the process of working through the past but makes mourning impossible and transmutes it into "endless melancholy."¹⁸⁹ It also blurs the distinction between victims, perpetrators and bystanders, but as LaCapra emphasizes, "victim" is not a psychological, but "a social, political, and ethical category."¹⁹⁰ It is therefore of

of Washington Press, 2004); Jonathan J. Long, *W. G. Sebald. Image, Archive, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Long, "Time and Narrative"; Long, "Power, Desire."

¹⁸⁶ The most prominent proponent of this branch is Cathy Caruth, who conceives all of history as trauma. Cf. ch. 1, Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience. Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). For a critical examination of trauma theory, cf. Ruth Leys, *Trauma. A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). For an exploration of trauma as history within the context of literature, cf. Sigrid Weigel, "Télescopage im Unbewußten. Zum Verhältnis von Trauma, Geschichtsbegriff und Literatur," in *Trauma. Zwischen Psychoanalyse und kulturellem Deutungsmuster*, ed. Elisabeth Bronfen, et al. (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau, 1999), 51-76.

¹⁸⁷ LaCapra, "Trauma, Absence, Loss," 48f.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 64.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 46.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 79.

utmost importance to insist on this distinction. Whereas victims of historical trauma may relive traumatic events and thus be hindered from acting responsibly in the present, melancholic identification as such, in which one is possessed by the past, is not an ethically responsible position.

In Sebald's essay on Grass and Hildesheimer, Cosgrove identifies Sebald's historical attitude as it "communicates a preference for the transhistorical register, history as melancholy apathy, and an interesting identification (...) with the Jewish victims of the Holocaust."¹⁹¹ She explains Sebald's preference for Hildesheimer by pointing to the older author's "tendency towards abstraction which effects the reduction of historical time to a melancholy present," a practice that Sebald too employed in his writing.¹⁹² It is not important here to reiterate Cosgrove's argument in favor of Grass, but her final conclusion is valid and deserves emphasis: while she defends the melancholy position on the past "on the level of subjective experience," she warns against turning it into a normative framework for understanding history.¹⁹³ If Sebald indeed drew on Hildesheimer's example to formulate guidelines on how to write about Jewish suffering and to mourn victims of genocide—this is essentially Cosgrove's argument—his reading of *Tynset* and the set of recommendations that consequently emerged ought not be confused with Hildesheimer's intention.

LaCapra and Cosgrove show the limits of melancholia as a transhistorical category. While Flatley, Kazanjian, and Eng postulate melancholia as creative productivity for political life, as transhistorical register it promotes socio-political paralysis. The work of melancholia, as opposed to the work of mourning, does not necessarily allow for working through, and while Kazanjian and Eng discover therein the potential to continuously negotiate a connection between past and present, endless

¹⁹¹ Cosgrove, "Melancholy Competitions," 221.

¹⁹² Ibid., 225.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 232.

melancholia threatens to empty the future of meaning: endless melancholia does not enable socio-political action, as they argue, through a permanent relationship to the past; instead they are opposites. Melancholia *obstructs* the path into the future.

In the two public statements regarding the function of literature that he made (in *The Frankfurt Lectures*, 1967, and “The End of Fiction,” 1975), discussed in the next chapter, Hildesheimer emphasizes that literature does not aim to change society. He does not engage in his melancholy writing style for the sake of socio-political action, nor is he an uninvolved onlooker either. Far from it: Hildesheimer’s political position underwent a process of radicalization throughout the sixties and seventies that was motivated by his own experience as Jewish writer in West Germany. This politicization found resonance in his work, and it is in the context of *Tynset* that Hildesheimer emerges as politically engaged writer, without, however, proclaiming that literature can bring about change. Finally it is with *Masante* that Hildesheimer draws his own conclusion as to the function of literature, and as a consequence he leaves the literary scene (almost) altogether.

CHAPTER III

“Niederschreiben um abzustreifen”:¹ Wolfgang Hildesheimer’s *Masante*

Tynset earned Hildesheimer a reputation “als ernstzunehmender Autor.”² More than one hundred and thirty reviews, published in every major newspaper and magazine, discussed *Tynset*. As the examples of Reinhard Baumgart’s and Peter Horst Neumann’s reviews have shown, many of the early reviewers assessed *Tynset* negatively, belittling it as covering well-trodden ground and taking a limited view that saw its plot as merely the tale of an insomniac recounting memories that have no bearing on the reader.³ Other reviews, in which *Tynset* is discussed quite positively for its style and which helped Hildesheimer achieve some popularity, paradoxically factor out the book’s main theme altogether. Stephan Braese thus concludes that the thematization of the Nazi past was placed under a strict taboo in these positive reviews and that praise for the book was limited to those aspects of the text unrelated to Hildesheimer’s *Entsetzlichem*.⁴ Crucial exceptions were reviews by Walter Jens and Hilde Domin. Jens, whose repeated mention of his own friendship with Hildesheimer almost amounts to an apology for addressing the author’s concern with the Nazi past, calls *Tynset* “klassische Prosa” that, despite a timeless aesthetic gained from “melancholischen Geschichten, mit denen der *homo nocturnus* sich seiner Lage

¹ Wolfgang Hildesheimer, *Masante*, in *Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Gesammelte Werke in sieben Bänden, Bd. II, Monologische Prosa*, ed. Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig and Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 155-366, here 348. I am indebted to Braese’s work reconstructing Hildesheimer’s experience as Jewish writer in West Germany, and in this chapter I draw heavily on his research, cf. Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 365-428.

² Jehle, *Werkgeschichte*, 88.

³ For the reception of *Tynset*, cf. Patricia Haas Stanley, *Wolfgang Hildesheimer and His Critics* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1993), 18-31.

⁴ Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 306.

versichert,” includes “das Porträt eines Saturniers im Auschwitz-Jahrhundert.”⁵ While Jens is “[g]ern bereit, [s]ich widerlegen zu lassen,” he recommends several of *Tynset*’s passages—those describing the murderer Kabasta, the labyrinthine Wilhelmstadt, and the “Traktat über Namen und Nasen”—for inclusion in German schoolbooks to show students, “wie man anno 65 deutsche Prosa schreibt.”⁶ *Entsetzliches* hovers underneath these passages, and while this kind of prose is in fact *not* exemplary of what was written in 1965, Jens wishes that it were. What Jens truly celebrates is the way Hildesheimer connected the black—that is, melancholic—“Erfahrungsbericht eines Menschen” with “der distanzierenden Heiterkeit des Fiktiven,” thereby pointing to the balance of *Haupt-* and *Nebenthemen*. He shows in his review of *Tynset*, as Braese writes,

wie erinnerndes Schreiben eines jüdischen Schriftstellers deutscher Sprache “nach Auschwitz” *unter Einschluss* eines Blickes auf die Verbrechen gewürdigt werden kann, *ohne* sich weder „unbewältigter Gegenwart“ noch dem Nachleben der NS-Verbrechen *als konkreter Konstituante dieses Schreiben* aussetzen zu müssen.⁷

In his review Jens demonstrated how to honor Hildesheimer as a Jewish writer who wrote about the Nazi crimes without limiting himself to Holocaust fiction. With this assessment Jens released Hildesheimer from the status to which he had been relegated by Baumgart and Neumann, who accused him of writing only about what is so “annoyingly well known.” Jens did not, however, avoid acknowledging the thematization of the genocide, as other positive reviewers of *Tynset* did.⁸ More

⁵ Walter Jens, “Ein Ausgelieferter übertönt die Nacht,” in *Über Wolfgang Hildesheimer*, ed. Dierk Rodewald (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1971) 121-27, here 126, 124, 126. (Originally written for *Die Zeit*, March 19, 1965.)

⁶ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁷ Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 307.

⁸ In yet another set of reviews references to the Nazi past are acknowledged; however, these references are interpreted as if they stood for a general concern for the past that is shared by all. Wiegenstein, who stood in close connection to Group 47, presents in his 1965 review for *Frankfurter Hefte* (May 1965) the “Phobie (...), dass die Mörder noch unter uns leben” positively because it is *not* “dick aufgetragen” and “wird (...) nie zum Hauptthema.” The reading of *Tynset* as a general memory book blurs the

significant is Domin's review, in which the Jewish poet, herself an emigrant and returnee, acknowledges *Tynset's* narrator as a victim of Nazi persecution who suffers from "[dem] immer noch umgehende[n] Grauen jener zwölf Jahre."⁹ Despite the time that has passed since 1945, the narrator remains

ein(es) aus dem Zentrum verstoßene[r] Zeitgenosse(n). Großen Wert lege ich auf das Wort „Zeitgenosse.“ Dies [= *Tynset*] ist, versponnen und abseitig, wie es scheinen mag, eines der zeitgenössischsten Bücher der ganzen deutschen Nachkriegsliteratur. Das Politische daran ist durch so viele Erfahrungen hindurchgefiltert, dass es immer da ist, doch zugleich nicht da ist, uns plötzlich anspringt und sich dann wieder verbirgt.¹⁰

Domin marks the contemporaneity of the book by relating it to debates surrounding the statute of limitations: on March 10, almost simultaneous with the publication of *Tynset*, the German Bundestag lifted the statute of limitations for murder and introduced a separate category of genocide so as to continue prosecuting Nazi murderers. The debate reached its highpoint when Christian Democrat Ernst Benda, who had previously favored extending the statute of limitations from twenty to thirty years, changed his mind and sided with the Social Democrats, advocating abolishment of the statute altogether. Domin reads Hildesheimer's *Tynset*, in particular the episodes in which the narrator telephones former Nazis urging them to flee, claiming that their secret pasts have been disclosed, as a sentiment Benda originally articulated in the

distinction between who is remembering; for Wiegenstein, who points out "unser Erinnerungsvermögen, unsere Schlaflosigkeit," the difference between perpetrator and victim is non-existent. Roland H. Wiegenstein, "Nacht ohne Schlaf," in *Über Wolfgang Hildesheimer*, ed. Dierk Rodewald (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1971), 127-33, here 132. Schäble's review is similar, cf. Schäble, "Hamlets unmögliche Rache." Heißenbüttel acknowledges that the narrator comes from "Judengasse" but adds that this "kurze mögliche Bezugszipfelchen" is too elusive to base the interpretation of the book on; after all, the narrator's Jewish heritage—and, connected with it, his history of persecution—could be "Täuschung," Helmut Heißenbüttel, "Nur Erfindung, nur Täuschung?," in *Über Wolfgang Hildesheimer*, ed. Dierk Rodewald (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1971), 118-21, here 119.

⁹ Domin, "Denk ich an Deutschland," 124.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Bundestag by proclaiming: “Ich mag keinen Mörder zum Nachbarn.”¹¹ *Tynset* is Hildesheimer’s poetic expression of the same sentiment, and therein, Domin argues, lies its political message.¹² In an environment where the public generally eschewed engagement with the Nazi past and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* was practiced primarily within a judicial framework and in the context of foreign relations, I assign political power to Hildesheimer’s public confrontation with this past as evidenced in *Tynset* and other works discussed in this chapter. By political I mean a concern with and an involvement in public life as it relates to questions of the *polis*, that is, the political community, and to processes by which groups and individuals negotiate their public interests so that they may be realized. In Germany of the 1950s and 1960s public references to the Holocaust by a Jewish minority living in Germany or, as is the case for Hildesheimer, writing for a German audience, must be considered as having political significance.

With this chapter I turn attention to Hildesheimer’s development from an author perceived as harmless by the *Literaturbetrieb* to the author of *Masante*, his most political prose work and the final product of his career as prose writer. His subsequent decision to stop writing was ultimately consistent with his conviction that after Auschwitz writing fiction had become impossible, a conviction he articulated in reference to Adorno’s famous words regarding poetry after Auschwitz.

¹¹ Qtd. in: Domin, “Denk ich an Deutschland,” 127.

¹² On the topic of the 1965 debate on the statute of limitations, Hildesheimer expressed his deep concern succinctly: “Das Verjähren dieser [Verbrechen] am 8. Mai 1965 ist eine Schande—ich kann es noch gar nicht glauben, bis es soweit ist—und ich bin fest überzeugt, dass es sich bitter rächen wird. Denn es ist noch gar nicht abzusehen, wer da aus seinem Schlupfloch wieder hervorkommt. Es wird sich herausstellen, dass es noch unzählige kleine und große Eichmänner und Eiseles gibt. Aber dann ist es zu spät,” Simon Wiesenthal, ed. *Verjährung? 200 Persönlichkeiten des öffentlichen Lebens sagen nein. Eine Dokumentation* (Frankfurt/M.: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1965), 76f.

The Radicalization of Hildesheimer's Political Melancholia

Despite the mixed reception of *Tynset*—blunt criticism, on the one hand, and appreciation that ignored central issues in the novel, on the other hand—Hildesheimer received two prestigious literary prizes, an event which by itself was controversial and created another flood of newspaper articles. In January 1966 Hildesheimer accepted the Bremen Literary Prize of the Rudolf Alexander Schröder Foundation, and in October of the same year the Georg Büchner Prize, awarded by the German Academy of Language and Poetry. At the award ceremonies Hildesheimer gave speeches concerning politics and melancholia, respectively, the two issues that underlie *Tynset* as a whole.¹³ Both speeches are worth examining, for they are rare examples in which Hildesheimer directly references the German political culture of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and melancholia.

Bremen Literary Prize

Hildesheimer, known as a polite member of Group 47,¹⁴ uses the Bremen speech as a platform to polemicize against the insincerity of West German politicians whose revisionist rhetoric drives German democracy “dorthin, wo der Faschismus auf uns wartet, um uns wieder aufzunehmen.”¹⁵ His speech also sets out to contradict the reception of *Tynset* as a book in which the Nazi past has no significance. Hildesheimer rigorously, and for the first time publicly, addresses with this speech the continued threat of the past, doing so because he cannot “die Gelegenheit zu einer öffentlichen Ansprache ungenutzt vorbeiziehen (...) lassen”: to do so would be an act

¹³ Cf. Jehle, *Werkgeschichte*, 90.

¹⁴ Cf. Wolfdietrich Schnurre, “Seismographen waren sie nicht,” in *Die Gruppe 47. Bericht--Kritik--Polemik*, ed. Reinhard Lettau (Neuwied, Berlin: Luchterhand, 1967), 159-63, here 160. Qtd. in: Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 233.

¹⁵ Wolfgang Hildesheimer, “Zur Verleihung des Bremer Literaturpreises,” in *Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Gesammelte Werke in sieben Bänden. Bd. VII, Vermischte Schriften*, ed. Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig and Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 27-30, here 29.

“*lebensfremden* Leichtsinn” (29, emphasis mine). Giving voice to his objections is arguably a matter of life and death.

With the opening lines of his speech Hildesheimer thematizes both the past, by referring to Hitler, and the present, by emphasizing that the past has not yet been worked through. After acknowledging the financial part of the award, he says:

Mehr als dies [=das Geldgeschenk] freut mich die Anerkennung meiner Arbeit durch Vertreter einer Stadt, die sich einer guten Vergangenheit rühmen darf. Mit Vergangenheit meine ich hier nicht die hanseatische, sondern vielmehr jene Vergangenheit, die man noch immer als „die jüngste“ bezeichnet, obgleich sie ziemlich alt ist, wenn auch leider noch nicht vom Tode durch Bewältigung gezeichnet. Hier in dieser Stadt aber hat sich Hitler nicht wohlgefühlt, und er hat sie daher kaum besucht. Möge der Glanz einer solcher Abwesenheit niemals stumpf werden. (27)

The polite gesture of praising his host city clashes with the content of Hildesheimer’s praise. He does not indulge in such clichés as remarking upon the city’s beauty or hospitality, or celebrating Hanseatic history. Instead, Hildesheimer defines Bremen’s outstanding feature via a negative, as an absence: he appreciates Bremen because Hitler had *not* appreciated it; Bremen has a good, even shining past because Hitler rarely spent time there. No one can take credit when receiving such praise, least of all politicians, to whom Hildesheimer turns after this first mention of the Nazi past. He points more generally, and perhaps in reference to chancellor Ludwig Erhard’s disparaging remark of writers as pinschers (a breed of fighting dog)¹⁶ to the fact that

¹⁶ In the 1965 publication, *Plädoyer für eine neue Regierung. Keine Alternative*, twenty-five German-speaking authors took up on the 1961 manifesto *Die Alternative. Brauchen wir eine neue Regierung?*, in which authors had questioned Christian Democrat leadership and suggested a different course in politics. In the 1965 collection, authors directly demanded a change in leadership and spoke (albeit not univocally) in support of the Social Democrats. In response to *Plädoyer*, chancellor Erhard (CDU) accused the authors of “Intellektualismus, der in Idiotie umschlägt.” To Rolf Hochmuth’s criticism of his government, Erhard responded, in a public speech, as follows: “Da hört bei mir der Dichter auf, und es fängt der ganz kleine Pinscher an, der in dümmster Weise kläfft.” Out of solidarity to those authors who took a critical stance vis-à-vis West Germany’s government, Hildesheimer referred to himself as “Pinscher.” Hans Werner Richter, ed. *Plädoyer für eine neue Regierung oder Keine Alternative* (Reinbek b. Hamburg: Rororo, 1965); Martin Walser, ed. *Die Alternative oder Brauchen wir eine neue*

politicians and writers do not share a common language. Where writers like himself “ein wenig tiefer an der Wurzel ansetzen [wollen] und (...) von moralischen Grundlagen der Politik [sprechen],” politicians remain on the surface, primarily because the moral foundation of politics is “den regierenden Politikern bei uns wenig geläufig, weil es sie nicht interessiert, weil es ihnen als wirklichkeitsfremd erscheint” (27).¹⁷ Instead of humbly accepting the moral responsibility that accompanies political office, politicians settle into a moral “Hohlraum” from which they speak

bestürzende Banalität, wenn nicht gar die kläglische Floskel, bedenkenlos oder zynisch angewendet. Nur nach unten reicht die Skala weit. Hinab nämlich zur dumpfen und militanten Lautmalerei, dorthin, wo der Affekt des Unbelehrbaren sein widerliches Wesen treibt, wo jedes Wort der Vernunft als Zumutung zurückgewiesen wird. (28)

While Hildesheimer does not directly say so, perhaps he associates anti-Semitism with the affect of the uneducable, as he warns against the contemporary reactionary who carries “beängstige [sic] Züge dessen, was er vor einem Vierteljahrhundert einmal war” and whose dreams quickly became “Forderung, [und] aus ihr Wirklichkeit” (28). The politician’s moral void is positioned on the right: “Die rechte Position wird soeben eingenommen, und zwar von uns. So will es unsere Politik” (29). By extension, the West German public’s values also slant in this direction, towards the edge of a void.

Regierung? (Reinbek b. Hamburg: Rororo, 1961). Cf. N. N., “Im Stil der Zeit,” *Der Spiegel* 19, no. 30 (1965), 17-18; Hildesheimer, “Zur Verleihung des Bremer Literaturpreises,” 29.

¹⁷ From the examples Hildesheimer lists it is clear that he does not only refer to political office holders but also to high-ranking clergymen who articulate their political opinions publicly: their opinions regarding the corrupt one-party system of Portugal, which was viewed positively, and the Soviet population, which was dismissed with a comparison to degenerate dogs, “fallen wie faule Äpfel. Die eine [Meinung] ist die eines Ministers, die andere die eines Kardinals. (Beide heißen übrigens Jaeger, aber daran—wenigstens!—sind sie schuldlos.)” Hildesheimer, “Zur Verleihung des Bremer Literaturpreises,” 29. Hildesheimer refers to justice minister Richard Jaeger, former member of the SA and, after 1945, prominent CSU politician, and cardinal Lorenz Jaeger.

The Second Emigration

When Hildesheimer speaks of “our politics,” he refers to German politics. In 1965 Hildesheimer was, once again, a citizen of Germany. In Braese’s account, no other German-speaking Jewish author tried as hard as Hildesheimer did to enter the West German literary scene and become a successful German postwar author.¹⁸ When he first arrived in Nuremberg, his letters to his parents in Palestine were quite critical of the German population, whose only response to the war and the genocide Hildesheimer perceived as self-pity wholly overshadowing any sense of responsibility.¹⁹ While he adopted a “policy of non-cooperation and disinterest” in his dealings with German civilians,²⁰ in 1949 he had already written his parents that Germans were “vielleicht nicht zum groessten aber doch zum grossen Teil schuldlos.”²¹ His involvement with Group 47 played a significant role in his decision to remain in Germany, a decision that his parents worriedly anticipated and attempted to influence. Knowing their concern, Hildesheimer wrote in 1951, before his first participation in a Group 47 meeting:

Ich war wahrscheinlich noch nie so ereignisbewusst wie jetzt und ich bin mir auch völlig klar darüber, was in Deutschland passieren kann, wenn es die anständig denkenden Intellektuellen nicht verhindern. (...) [I]ch gedenke, ein Jude zu bleiben. Ich kann nicht leugnen, dass ich erwogen habe, hier zu bleiben, denn ich bin hier sehr glücklich, weil ich gewissermaßen hierher gehöre. Dass ich hier bleiben werde glaube ich nicht, aber ich bin noch nicht ganz entschlossen. Ich gedenke mich nächstens mit Herrn v. Cube, Dirks, Guggenheimer darüber zu unterhalten, außerdem mit den Schriftstellern der „Gruppe 47“ die die maßgebendsten—und wirklichkeitsnächsten—Schriftsteller Deutschlands sind, und die mich eingeladen haben, bei ihnen zu lesen wonach ich wahrscheinlich in die Gruppe aufgenommen werde.²²

¹⁸ Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 236.

¹⁹ Hildesheimer, letter to Arnold and Hanna Hildesheimer, March 3, 1947, WHA 456.

²⁰ July 26, 1949, Hildesheimer, *Briefe*, 22.

²¹ Hildesheimer, letter to Arnold and Hanna Hildesheimer, September 15, 1949, WHA 456, qtd. in: Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 238.

²² Hildesheimer, letter to Arnold and Hanna Hildesheimer, no date [early 1951], WHA 456, qtd. in: *ibid.*

Hildesheimer here connects his decision to stay in Germany with the success of Group 47—his success within it as well as the group’s dynamics in general. Knowing the dynamics within the group—Hans Werner Richter’s insistence, for instance, on wartime *Erlebnis* as central category for postwar literature—one might guess that Hildesheimer’s participation in the Dürkheim meeting in 1951 might have convinced him not to seek membership.²³ However, it was this meeting, which Hildesheimer described as international and inclusive of Jews and therefore not with “nationale[m] Charakter” or anti-Semitic, as his parents had feared, that helped him reach a decision: “Ich werde wohl hierbleiben, das bedeutet nicht, dass ich mir der Gefahren nicht bewusst bin.”²⁴ After he told his parents that he had accepted the invitation to contribute short essays on contemporary literature for Richter’s publication *Die Literatur*,²⁵ they were even more alarmed and questioned Hildesheimer’s role in managing German “Kulturgut,” referring to a 1912 essay by Moritz Goldstein in which the Jewish literary critic had defined the work of Jewish Germanists as the administration of “den geistigen Besitz eines Volkes, das uns die Berechtigung und die Fähigkeit dazu abspricht.”²⁶ In Hildesheimer’s response to his parents, in which he defends his first article for *Die Literatur*, an essay critical of popular German authors Waldemar Bonsels and Ernst Wiechert that his father had urged him to withdraw, he defines his position as a German-speaking Jewish writer:

[I]ch „verwalte kein Kulturgut“ indem ich einen solchen Aufsatz schreibe. Von „Verwalten“ kann nicht die Rede sein. Wohl aber tue ich

²³ For an excellent discussion of Hildesheimer’s role in Group 47, cf. Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 236-52.

²⁴ Hildesheimer, letter to Arnold and Hanna Hildesheimer, May 30, 1951, WHA 456, qut. in: *ibid.*, 241.

²⁵ *Die Literatur: Blätter für Literatur, Film, Funk und Bühne* was edited by Hans Werner Richter and appeared twice a month from March 15 to November 1, 1952. Hildesheimer contributed ten articles, reprinted in Wolfgang Hildesheimer, *Mit dem Bausch dem Bogen. Zehn Glossen mit einer Grafik*, ed. Volker Jehle (Warmbronn: Keicher, 1990).

²⁶ Moritz Goldstein, “Deutsch-jüdischer Parnaß,” *Der Kunstwart* 25, no. 11 (1912): 281-94, here 283. Qtd. in: Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 242.

etwas, zu dem mich diejenigen, die ich als kulturelle Vertreter der Nation anerkenne, aufgefordert haben. (...) Ich bin kein Literaturkritiker (obwohl ich einer sein könnte). Ich schreibe eine satirische Spalte in einer Literaturzeitschrift, in welcher ich mich mit einem Metier befasse, das ich selbst zu beherrschen glaube. Außerdem schreibe ich Geschichten und einen Roman, der ebenso, wie alles, was ich angreife, angegriffen werden kann. (...) Ich glaube, Ihr seht das alles heute etwas verzerrt, in einer Art jüdischen Selbsthass mit umgekehrten Vorzeichen. (...) [Ich bin kein politischer Publizist.] Bei mir geht es in erster Linie um ästhetische Dinge, weshalb auch die Tatsache, dass ich ein aus Palästina zurückgekehrter Jude bin, kein Argument ist. Ich kritisiere als Schriftsteller, der der deutschen Sprache mächtig ist, diejenigen[,] die sie missbrauchen. (...) Ein stichhaltiges Argument dagegen ist, dass man in solchen Artikeln den Geist ja nicht ändert, denn den wird es immer geben. Das ist zwar richtig, aber man versucht es eben trotzdem: wenn man nicht trotz Allem versucht bestehende Missstände zu bessern—eine der wesentlichen Aufgaben der Literatur—dann könnte man sich ebenso gut aufhängen.²⁷

Hildesheimer not only identifies as a German author to whom his Jewishness, at least as expressed here, is of little meaning in writing for the West German *Literaturbetrieb*, but he also defines the role of literature. Even though he is not a political publicist by his own assessment but is concerned primarily with aesthetics, he considers, in 1952, one of the primary functions of all literature, including his own, to be political. The role of literature is to try to remedy existing shortcomings, and as a German author it is his duty to address them. He invokes the tradition of using art as means of political enlightenment, with which his parents essentially agree, but in order to give his argument for his involvement in Group 47 more weight, he must furthermore prove that the cultural sphere of postwar Germany is not, like Goldstein's Germany, anti-Semitic. He points to the inclusiveness of the group by drawing on the three 1952 candidates for the Group 47 prize, two of whom are Jewish: himself and Ilse Aichinger.²⁸ That he and Aichinger are considered for the award is evidence of the

²⁷ February 4, 1952, Hildesheimer, *Briefe*, 29f.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

quality of their work, he argues, and not, as his parents seem to suggest, an indication “dafür, dass sich die Juden wieder in das deutsche Kulturleben zwängen.”²⁹ Were his parents to respond affirmatively to his rhetorical question as to whether he or Aichinger should, if chosen, reject the prize because of their Jewishness, it would show that there is a categorical and exclusive difference between Germans and Jews, a difference Hildesheimer knows that his parents do not insist on per se. Hildesheimer thus argues in this letter for his fundamental right to want to remain in Germany, even if he is motivated less by the desire to be German in any general sense than to be part of Group 47 and the German *Literaturbetrieb*.

Despite Hildesheimer’s momentary definition of literature as an attempt to remedy abuse, his work during the fifties was hardly received as political. Rather than directly confronting the horrors of the Nazi past, he wrote absurd, satirical prose and plays that scrutinized the world of artists and the consumer-oriented society during the early economic miracle. Richter remembered that Hildesheimer, with his “Humor und seine[r] (...) satirische[n] Art” promised a welcome “Erfrischung in der zu Ende gehenden ‘Kahlschlagperiode,’”³⁰ attesting to Richter’s misguided understanding of early postwar literature as serious confrontation with the past and praising Hildesheimer’s work as a turn towards lighter, more entertaining topics. Only abroad did *Lieblose Legenden*, Hildesheimer’s successful book debut (1952), provoke interest in the author’s background, for instance, when Dutch critic Adriaan Morriën commented that fortunately not even genocide had entirely eliminated Jewish humor in German literature.³¹ Although Walter Jens and W. E. Süsskind cautiously connected *Lieblose Legenden* and Hildesheimer’s 1953 novel *Paradies der falschen Vögel*, to a

²⁹ Ibid., 31.

³⁰ Hans Werner Richter, *Im Etablissement der Schmetterlinge. Einundzwanzig Portraits aus der Gruppe 47* (Munich: Hanser, 1986), 141.

³¹ Adriaan Morriën, “Die Satire kehrt in die deutsche Literatur zurück,” in *Über Wolfgang Hildesheimer*, ed. Dierk Rodewald (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1971), 83-85.

narrative tradition no longer present in Germany,³² his prose became synonymous with harmless entertainment.³³ “Hildesheimer tut nicht weh. Mit gewissen, immer wiederkehrenden wehmütigen und resignierten Handbewegungen bietet er in seiner sehr komprimierten Prosa zeitgenössisches Leben an.”³⁴ Hildesheimer thus met the wishes and expectations of the West German reading public: his prose was satirical, absurd, funny, and altogether harmless—at least if read superficially.³⁵

Braese carefully reconstructs the events that lead to fissures in Hildesheimer’s relationship to Group 47. In response to Fritz J. Raddatz’ request, during the group’s 1955 meeting, that Hildesheimer not write exclusively “Luxus-Hotel-Persiflagen,” the Jewish author replied that he was missing “das innere Erlebnis der Nazizeit” necessary to write serious literature. The reaction of the group, which included Richter, Böll, Kaiser, Walser, Grass, and Heißenbüttel, but also Aichinger and Bachmann, was laughter: “Man ‘lachte (...), aber nicht böse,’ und ‘[sagte] nur: Seien Sie froh!’”³⁶ As Braese concludes, ten years after the war and four years after Hildesheimer joined the group, the *sine qua non* of belonging remained the wartime *Erlebnis* that superseded any concern for how those not directly involved in warfare as German soldiers had experienced the Nazi regime. Instead of such curiosity “tritt verräterisch die vermeintliche Gewissheit eines deutlichen Vorsprungs an Leiden (‘Seien Sie froh!’).”

³² Walter Jens, “Altväterliche Betrachtung,” in *Über Wolfgang Hildesheimer*, ed. Dierk Rodewald (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1971), 81-83; W. E. Süskind, “Paradies der falschen Vögel,” in *Über Wolfgang Hildesheimer*, ed. Dierk Rodewald (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1971), 86-88.

³³ This is one of Braese’s main points of criticism regarding the reception of Jewish-German literature in West Germany in general, cf. Braese, *Andere Erinnerung*.

³⁴ Karl Krolow, “Mit Anmut modern,” in *Wolfgang Hildesheimer*, ed. Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1989), 156.

³⁵ Lea shows in his reading of Hildesheimer that the theme of prosecution was omnipresent in his early prose. Lea, *Wolfgang Hildesheimers Weg*, e.g., 95-104, 59-82. For a concrete example see Braese’s illuminating discussion of “Kleines Reisetagebuch um Robert Neumann,” in which Hildesheimer refers directly to the murder of the Jews of Salonika, Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 252ff. Wolfgang Hildesheimer, “Kleines Reisetagebuch um Robert Neumann,” in *Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Gesammelte Werke in sieben Bänden. Bd. VII, Vermischte Schriften*, ed. Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig and Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 570-72.

³⁶ Qtd. in: Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 251.

Braese continues: “Das kennzeichnende Wir-Gefühl der Gruppe—exklusiv gegenüber jedem, der ein *anderes* hatte—war unerschüttert.”³⁷ Hildesheimer was quite aware of the gulf between Jewish and non-Jewish participants in the group, a perception to which a letter to Paul Celan attests. Celan had previously acknowledged to Hildesheimer that Group 47 considered him (Celan) an “Überempfindlichen” and “an Verfolgungswahn Leidenden.” In the same letter he appealed to Hildesheimer to take seriously his “Pflicht (...), Hitlerei nicht stillschweigend hinzunehmen,” regardless of the “Spielregeln des Literaturbetriebs” to dismiss unpleasant references to the past as “(jüdische(n)...) Überempfindlichkeit.”³⁸ In his response letter, Hildesheimer expressly sides with Celan as a *Jewish* writer: “Es wäre mir unerträglich, wenn Sie auch mich zu den indolenten oder gar den ‘Anderen’ zählen wollten.”³⁹ He emphasizes that he is not one of the others—that is, not one of the German rule makers—but belongs to those accused of Jewish hypersensitivity. He is, as Celan writes in response, one of the “unhappy few [sic]”: both men “haben (...) den neuen und alten Verfinsterungen nichts entgegensetzen als unsere Freundschaft und Solidarität.”⁴⁰ When Hildesheimer tests how the “others” in Group 47 react to the later prose pieces of *Lieblose Legenden*, added to the 1962 edition but written in the mid- to late fifties, which were meant “aufhorchen zu lassen,”⁴¹ he discovers that no one bothers to listen.

Disillusioned with Group 47 and, as he later admits, with life in postwar Germany, Hildesheimer emigrates a second time in 1957, thereby declaring his

³⁷ Ibid., 252.

³⁸ Parenthesis and ellipsis in the original. December 23, 1959, Hildesheimer, *Briefe*, 98.

³⁹ December 27, 1959, *ibid.*, 99.

⁴⁰ January 2, 1960, *ibid.*, 100. Hildesheimer agrees with Celan in his reply, emphasizing again their “Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl,” January 5, Hildesheimer, *Briefe*, 101.

⁴¹ Wolfgang Hildesheimer, “Zu den Lieblosen Legenden,” in *Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Gesammelte Werke in sieben Bänden. Bd. I, Erzählende Prosa*, ed. Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig and Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 506-07, here 507.

remigration failed. Although Hildesheimer names most frequently his and his wife's health issues as reason to move to the more Southern climate of Poschiavo,⁴² Grisons, and though his letters to his mother and his sister reveal no overt disappointment with German society per se, retrospectively Hildesheimer takes a clear stance against the German mindset in which, as he famously formulated in 1967, "die Dimension Auschwitz (...) nicht enthalten ist."⁴³ In 1962, following the invitation of Hermann Kesten to contribute to the collection *Ich lebe nicht in der Bundesrepublik*, Hildesheimer composes a document, "Die vier Hauptgründe, warum ich nicht in der Bundesrepublik lebe," which, although he withdrew it for publication, is perhaps one of the essential texts for understanding postwar German-Jewish identity.⁴⁴

"Ich bin Jud [sic]. Zwei Drittel aller Deutschen sind Antisemiten. Sie waren es immer und werden es immer bleiben" is the one passage from Hildesheimer's text that made it into print in 1964 and was later quoted by Marcel Reich-Ranicki in his study on Jews in German literature.⁴⁵ This is the first reason why Hildesheimer does not live

⁴² Cf. Hildesheimer's statement in an 1982 interview: "Ich bin dann auch nicht emigriert, sondern meine Frau und ich suchten einfach, und zwar systematisch, einen Wohnsitz südlich der Alpen, weil wir als Rheumatiker nördlich der Alpen, in Bayern, wo wir es schön fanden, nicht aushielten. Deshalb sind wir nach Poschiavo in Graubünden gezogen. Von einer Emigration, zumindest von einer *bewussten* Emigration, kann eigentlich nicht die Rede sein. Ich fühle mich auch gar nicht als emigriert," Hildesheimer and Kesting, "Ende der Fiktionen," 58. When compared to Peter Weiss and his decision to remain in exile, Hildesheimer vehemently denies that he is an emigrant: "Das ist etwas völlig anderes und wird immer wieder missverstanden. Peter Weiss war tatsächlich im Exil. (...) Das Exilbewußtsein oder Exilgefühl habe ich niemals verspürt," Hildesheimer and Durzak, "Potentielles Ich," 272. Lea argues that Hildesheimer's refusal to be compared to Weiss stems from his lack of feeling at home anywhere in the world: having moved frequently since a child, Lea writes, Hildesheimer has no sense of "Heimatgefühl" and therefore experiences no "Exilbewusstsein," Lea, *Hildesheimers Weg*, 38. Richter is convinced that Hildesheimer did not leave for political reasons: "Er [=Hildesheimer] zog in die Schweiz, nicht, weil es ihm in Bayern nicht mehr gefiel, sondern weil er glaubte, seine Frau Sylvia [sic], die etwas schwerhörig war, könne dort in Poschiavo besser hören. Es kann aber auch sein, dass es die Luftveränderung war, die ihn dazu veranlasste," Richter, *Etablisment der Schmetterlinge*, 143.

⁴³ Wolfgang Hildesheimer, "Frankfurter Poetik-Vorlesungen," in *Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Gesammelte Werke in sieben Bänden. Bd. VII, Vermischte Schriften*, ed. Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig and Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 43-100, here 57.

⁴⁴ The five-page typescript is archived in Berlin (WHA 190). Lacking Silvia Hildesheimer's permission to cite from the unpublished text, I rely on excerpts published by Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 265-68. Cf. Hermann Kesten, ed. *Ich lebe nicht in der Bundesrepublik* (Munich: List, 1964).

⁴⁵ Marcel Reich-Ranicki, *Über Ruhestörer. Juden in der deutschen Literatur* (Munich: Piper, 1973), 46. Reich-Ranicki lists as source *Twen* 1964:1, n. pag. It is unclear how Hildesheimer's statement made it

in Germany. In the typescript, the passage continues: “Zwar ist den Ergebnissen demoskopischer Untersuchungen nach nur die knappe Hälfte, nämlich 463 von 1000 Befragten ‘betont antisemitisch,’ aber das ist ja auch genug, vor allem, wenn man an die vielen Unbetonten denkt.”⁴⁶ After a concise sketch of different forms anti-Semitism takes in Germany—in politics and among intellectuals, as a fashionable accessory one displays “wie eine Taschenuhr,” or a permanent conviction by which “alle Juden ausgerottet werden müssten”—Hildesheimer names the second reason for not living in Germany: the “Intoleranz und Engstirnigkeit, (...) Torheit und Böswilligkeit, Feigheit und Bigotterie, (...) Mangel an Einsicht und Selbstkritik.”⁴⁷ This list is again followed by an enumeration of examples from public life in which injustice, intolerance, ignorance, and incompetence meet no resistance except by a small minority (including writers), who count for nothing in the German public. Hildesheimer cites as his third reason the general apathy “gegenüber allen Geschehnissen, die nicht unmittelbar Deutschland angehen,” a plight for which he primarily blames the German press, which was provincial and consequently made reliance on foreign press necessary. The fourth and final reason is Hildesheimer’s membership in the Jewish minority that might suddenly be forced to leave Germany again:

Es ist gut, ein Refugium zu haben, in welchem man Mitglieder der Minderheit aufnehmen kann, sollten sie sich vielleicht einmal genötigt sehen, Deutschland bei Nacht und Nebel zu verlassen. (...) Ich gehöre

into *Twen*; Lea speculates that List, Kesten’s publishing house, included it in an advertisement for the book before the book itself went into print and before Hildesheimer withdrew his contribution. Cf. Lea, *Hildesheimers Weg*, 43. Reich-Ranicki had asked Hildesheimer for permission to quote him and to send additional statements of Hildesheimer’s regarding his Jewishness. Hildesheimer responded that he had “keine Ahnung, um welche Äußerungen es sich handeln mag, aber wenn sie *wirklich* von mir sind, dürfen Sie sie gerne benutzen. Sonstige Äußerungen zu diesem Thema [=Judentum] habe ich nicht—natürlich sind sie in TYNSET enthalten und werden in meinem nächsten Buch noch zahlreicher und schärfer enthalten sein.” Reich-Ranicki, letter to Hildesheimer, September 23, 1969; Hildesheimer, letter to Reich-Ranicki, October 4, 1969, Hildesheimer, *Briefe*, 161, 62.

⁴⁶ Qtd. in: Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 265f.

⁴⁷ Qtd. in: *ibid.*, 266.

nicht zur Mehrheit, die antisemitisch ist, und ich mag nicht zur Minderheit gehören, die eine solche Mehrheit in Kauf nimmt. Kurz: ich mag nicht dazugehören.⁴⁸

Hildesheimer identifies directly in opposition with the “others” of whom he spoke in his letter to Celan: he is Jewish, and as such he cannot live in Germany. Quite suddenly he has adopted the position even his parents were reluctant to take in 1952, namely that there is an irreconcilable difference between Jews and Germans, which cannot be resolved despite the fact that Hildesheimer continues to consider himself a German-speaking writer. This position is incompatible with remaining in Germany. Between 1951, the time of his decision to stay in Germany, and 1957, when he emigrated to the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland, his interest in “hierzubleiben” gave way to his conviction, “nicht dazuzugehören.” During those years he realized that those guilty of Nazi crimes or complicit with the Nazi system permeated German public life. Prefacing the four reasons why he does not live in Germany, Hildesheimer writes:

Als ich 1947 nach Deutschland zurückkehrte, hatte ich in Nürnberg viel mit—meist minderen—Kriegsverbrechern zu tun. Die meisten behaupteten, bevor die Last des Gegenbeweises sie erdrückte, keine Nazis gewesen zu sein. Es waren meist ziemlich unangenehme, oft unheimliche, Leute, aber nicht unangenehmer und unheimlicher als Viele, die *heute im öffentlichen Leben* beider Deutschlande eine Rolle spielen. Damals aber spielten solche Leute eben noch keine Rolle, damals war noch alles in der Schwebe, die Möglichkeit bestand, dass alles sich zum Guten wende, und das Gefühl, dass es mit Deutschland moralisch aufwärts gehe, war nicht abwegig. (...) [I]ch fühlte mich in Deutschland wohl, denn ich huldigte dem Glauben, dass die Schuldigen in der Minderheit wären. *Heute weiß ich*, dass sie in der Mehrheit waren: nicht als aktive Mörder, sondern als Untermauerer oder willige Mitläufer, als Opportunisten und Nutznießer eines Systems, in dem die Mörder eine wichtige Funktion hatten.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Qtd. in: *ibid.*, 267f.

⁴⁹ Qtd. in: *ibid.*, 265. Emphasis mine.

This statement summarizes Hildesheimer's changing position vis-à-vis Germany—from his cautiously hopeful attitude and his feeling of belonging (which stemmed, as shown above, from his affiliation with Group 47) to his utter disillusionment and disappointment. The withdrawal of the text from Kesten's collection ought not to be seen as evidence that Hildesheimer developed doubts or that his submission had been written hastily and without consideration of its consequences. Kesten acknowledged receipt of the document in January 1963;⁵⁰ Hildesheimer withdrew it ten months later, in November, after the book had appeared during neither the spring nor the fall publication season. Pressure on chancellor Konrad Adenauer had increased in the intervening months due to the Spiegel affair⁵¹; in mid-October, Adenauer resigned and Erhard followed in office. Hildesheimer explains the withdrawal of his text, one month after the reformation of the government, with the hope that Adenauer's resignation meant a change in the political climate: "[E]in anderer Kanzler ist da, dem ich gern the benefit of the doubt geben möchte. Die von mir beschriebenen Zustände gelten nicht mehr richtig, zwar hat sich nichts gebessert, aber die Lage hat sich doch ein wenig geändert. Wahrscheinlich bleibt alles furchtbar, aber man sollte mit seinem Urteil noch ein wenig zurückhalten."⁵² The withdrawal of the document must be seen in the context of the governmental change, not as a change of heart by Hildesheimer. In place of Hildesheimer's contribution Kesten published a letter by an author who refused to participate in his project, and though Kesten did not disclose the name, it is quite possible that the excerpt comes from Hildesheimer. Kesten wrote:

⁵⁰ Kesten, letter to Hildesheimer, January 10, 1963, WHA 503, qtd. in: *ibid.*, 268.

⁵¹ In an 1962 article, the news magazine *Der Spiegel* questioned the ability of the military to withstand an attack and defend West Germany; as result, journalists were arrested by order of defense minister Franz Josef Strauß and accused of treason. The instance provoked an enormous outcry among the public. Cf. Joachim Schöps, *Die Spiegel-Affäre des Franz-Josef Strauß*, Spiegel-Buch (Reinbek b. Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1983; David Schoenbaum, *Ein Abgrund von Landesverrat. Die Affäre um den Spiegel* (Berlin: Parthas, 2002).

⁵² November 16, 1963, Hildesheimer, *Briefe*, 122, 24.

„Weggezogen,“ schreibt ein Autor, der nach dem Kriege aus der Emigration zunächst in die Bundesrepublik zurückgekehrt war, „weggezogen sind wir, weil uns das (meteorologische) Klima in Bayern nicht mehr gefiel. Es war uns zu feucht. Dass uns nun das Klima in weiteren Sinne hier besser gefällt, liegt auf einer anderen Ebene (...). Tatsache ist, dass wir, wenn wir nach Deutschland fahren, nicht selten das Gefühl haben, wir seien emigriert.“⁵³

This is the only instance in which Hildesheimer, if indeed he is the letter's author, refers to himself as an emigrant, thus directly contradicting official statements in which, when asked about his second exile, he refutes the idea and vehemently denies that he is an emigrant.⁵⁴

In a much later interview, recorded in 1984 for an educational film, Hildesheimer returns once again to the question of *hierbleiben* vs. *nicht dazugehören*, and interestingly, he refers to his parents' warning that he, as a Jewish intellectual, ought not become a curator of German culture. Asked why he withdrew from public, he responds:

Was mich gehindert hat, in der Öffentlichkeit in Aktion zu treten, oder überhaupt meine Stimme abzugeben—ist die Tatsache, dass, wie Moritz Goldstein es bereits vor der Nazizeit gesagt hat, wir verwalten das—wir verwalten das Kulturgut einer Nation, die uns nicht dazu aufgefordert hat. Da meinte er die Juden, nicht wahr? Und deshalb wäre für mich, sagen wir mal, eine offizielle Position oder eine Position im

⁵³ Kesten, ed. *Ich lebe nicht in der Bundesrepublik*, 165. Lea identifies the anonymous author as Hildesheimer, cf. Lea, *Hildesheimers Weg*, 42. I agree with his assessment, especially since Peter Henninger concludes that only two writers—Hildesheimer and Hans Sahl—left Germany a second time after they had lived in exile during the Nazi period and initially returned to Germany. Only Hildesheimer matches the description of having settled in Bavaria and giving health issues as the official explanation for the second emigration. Cf. Peter Henninger, "Über ex(-)territoriales Schreiben am Beispiel von Wolfgang Hildesheimer," in *Was bleibt? Ex-Territorialisierung in der deutschsprachigen Prosa seit 1945*, ed. Bart Philipsen et al. (Tübingen, Basel: Francke, 2000), 1-254. The author states that the climate in Germany was too damp for his liking, which, if read with the theory of the four temperaments in mind, indicates that Germany was too reasonable, unemotional, and also too hopeful for him to remain there. The quality of melancholia is dry; moisture is attributed to the sanguine and phlegmatic temperaments.

⁵⁴ Cf. 158n42.

Literaturbetrieb oder in einem der Medien [sic], im Rundfunk oder in der Zeitung als Redakteur, unmöglich gewesen.⁵⁵

Thirty-two years after he defended his position as a *German* writer who had been invited to participate in the *Literaturbetrieb*, he publicly takes his parents' position that this active participation, for instance as critic or regular member of Group 47, is impossible because he is, above all, a *Jewish* writer. Instead he had decided to take up a position on the periphery and contribute to the *Litaraturbetrieb* as a German-speaking writer living abroad.

From Absurd Theatre to Melancholic Prose

Between his emigration in 1957 and the publication of *Tynset* eight years later, Hildesheimer's writing underwent a process of radicalization paralleling the development of his political consciousness. While allusions to the Nazi past arguably are present in his work from the beginning, Hildesheimer did not take up direct engagement with the topic until immediately after his move to Switzerland. At that juncture he wrote a critical review of *Vermächtnis*, conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler's posthumously published diaries, the title of which referred to a legacy Hildesheimer rejected because it was tainted by Furtwängler's controversial ties to the Nazi party.⁵⁶ This review entailed a critique of how the past appeared in a revised and edited form in the political and intellectual climate of the late 1950s. Hildesheimer then published *Spiele, in denen es dunkel wird* (1958), a collection of three plays similarly concerned with the Nazi past and its repercussions in the present.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Wolfgang Hildesheimer et al., "Dokument 2b: Gesprächsauszüge, Transkription," in *Schriftsteller der Gegenwart. Fragen an Wolfgang Hildesheimer in Poschiavo. Film für die gymnasiale Mittel-, Oberstufe* (1984), 13. The transcript is available at WHA 216.

⁵⁶ Cf. Wolfgang Hildesheimer, "Das 'Vermächtnis' Furtwänglers," in *Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Gesammelte Werke in sieben Bänden. Bd. VII Vermischte Schriften*, ed. Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig and Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 284-90.

⁵⁷ *Spiele, in denen es dunkel wird* (1958) include *Landschaft mit Figuren*, *Die Uhren*, and *Pastorale*, all of which are reprinted (*Pastorale* in its 1965 version) in Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig and Volker

With *Spiele*, Hildesheimer announced his poetic preference for the theatre of the absurd, which he loosely and in reference to Albert Camus identifies in 1960 as the “Gegenüberstellung des Menschen, der fragt, mit der Welt, die vernunftwidrig schweigt.”⁵⁸ In the Frankfurt lectures on poetics, Hildesheimer later makes an important addendum: the world not only remains silent but it “[*verweigert*] dem Menschen die Antwort auf seine Frage.”⁵⁹ He continues:

Die Welt schweigt, sie gibt keinen Urtext mehr. Pathetisch gesagt: der Sinn der Schöpfung enthüllt sich nicht, im Gegenteil: er wird immer rätselhafter—wir können hinzufügen: seit Auschwitz. Hier denn ist der Ansatzpunkt der absurden Prosa: nicht das Auffinden des Urtextes, sondern des Sich-Abfindens damit, dass er nicht gefunden wird; das Registrieren der Ersatzantworten, die Objektivierung des individuellen Ichs als Empfänger dieser Antworten, die Möglichkeiten, sich in dem zur Verfügung gestellten Raum einzurichten, und nicht zuletzt: das niemals endende Erstaunen darüber, wie gut sich andere in diesem Raum eingerichtet haben. Der Schriftsteller, für den dies ein Thema ist, hat kein anderes.⁶⁰

With the addition “seit Auschwitz” Hildesheimer marks his poetics as political: his work expresses continuous astonishment over how others have arranged themselves in a world that made Auschwitz possible. According to Hildesheimer the post-Auschwitz world was either mute or offered ersatz noise in order to distract from its silence. One also detects in Hildesheimer’s definition of the absurd the seeds of *Tynset*, in as far as the melancholic and the absurd appear to share an affiliation. Absurd theatre or prose, like Benjamin’s play of mourning, express the absence of an “Urtext,” but unlike in Lukács’s concept of the novel, in absurd prose no attempts are made to retrieve it.

Jehle, eds., *Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Gesammelte Werke in sieben Bänden. Bd. VI Theaterstücke* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991).

⁵⁸ Hildesheimer is paraphrasing Camus. Wolfgang Hildesheimer, “Über das absurde Theater,” in *Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Gesammelte Werke in sieben Bänden. Bd. VII Vermischte Schriften*, ed. Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig and Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 13-26, here 17.

⁵⁹ Hildesheimer, “Frankfurter Poetik-Vorlesungen,” 50. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

Hildesheimer's "seit Auschwitz" indicates the occurrence of a loss, and absurd prose registers—and accepts—it as an insurmountable absence that cannot be undone. One may suggest that absurd prose engages in endless melancholia, but it does not involve affect at all and lacks the emotional side of melancholia. Regarding absurd theatre, Hildesheimer writes that it does not ask questions; it does not expect answers.⁶¹ The flatness that Hildesheimer ascribed to the absurd led the German reception of *Spiele* to overlook the political element "seit Auschwitz." *Spiele* was reduced to a "Vokabular des Unspezifischen," and perhaps it was this misconception that led Hildesheimer in 1962 to recall his exclusive commitment to the absurd⁶² and negotiate anew his concern for the past in connection with his poetic strategies.

Ingeborg Bachmann's intervention in this process of negotiation is an instance where one can pinpoint the transition from Hildesheimer's theatre of the absurd to *Tynset*. Following her reading of one of his *Spiele* plays, *Landschaft mit Figuren*, Bachmann, a close friend of Hildesheimer's, wrote in a letter that the play reminded her of sailing a great boat in water that was smooth yet slow from the absence of wind:

Das Boot ist gut, das Wasser ist gut, aber Wind fehlt und ich frage mich warum (...) [Man] wird (...) vertrieben aus dem Stück, wird immer gleichgültiger, immer weniger betroffen, obwohl man sehr gut betroffen sein müsste und könnte. (...) Du hast mir geschrieben, dass einige meinen, Du solltest zurückkehren zu Deinen früheren Ausgängen. Das hielte ich für verfehlt, Du darfst es auch nicht mehr, aber ich glaube, Du kannst die Situation überprüfen und mit den neuen Mitteln sie verändern, zu einer neuen [Situation]. Die Veränderung freilich—und das ist wie das meiste sehr persönlich und für Dich daher vielleicht nicht fruchtbar gedacht—denke ich mir weder in der Veränderung des Stils, noch in irgendeiner Hinsicht literarischer Art, sondern in der schmerzhaftesten und schwersten Wendung—zu einem Warum, einem Woraufhin, einem Wozu. (...) [I]ch kann Dir nur etwas von einer Forderung mitteilen, die ich selber noch nicht zu erfüllen

⁶¹ Cf. Hildesheimer, "Über das absurde Theater," 15.

⁶² Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 259. Cf. Wolfgang Hildesheimer, "Die Realität selbst ist absurd," in *Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Gesammelte Werke in sieben Bänden. Bd. VI Theaterstücke*, ed. Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig and Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 826-28, here 827.

weiß und die mich quält; sie liegt vor dem Schreiben, vor jeder Errungenschaft.⁶³

In Hildesheimer's appreciative reply, he writes:

Was du freilich von der „schmerzhaften Wendung“ schreibst, das ist nur allzu gültig und berührt die Quelle meiner allertiefsten Zweifel. Ich habe noch nie jemandem—außer Silvia—gesagt, dass für mich das Schreiben ein ewiges Herumdrücken und Winden vor dem Eingangstor zu diesem Schmerz ist. Ich will nicht hindurch, weil ich die Folgen nicht absehe, (oder vielleicht allzu klar absehe?)[...] Ich fürchte, dass ich—zum Teil unbewusst—vor der allerletzten Konsequenz des Schreibens zurückschreke, nämlich: meine Lebenssubstanz dazuzugeben.⁶⁴

With *Tynset* and *Masante* Hildesheimer accomplishes the turn towards a fuller poetics that processes and articulates some of his “life essence.” In these two “praktisch autobiographische[n] Monologe[n]”⁶⁵ he radicalized the “poetische(e) *Vergegenwärtigung* jenes Fluchtpunkts, der [seine] Arbeit auch schon zuvor bestimmt hat—der ‘Urszenen der Verfolgung.’”⁶⁶ Previously too cautious to put to paper too much of his life's substance, Hildesheimer explained that with *Tynset* his writing and his life had become “eigentlich dasselbe.”⁶⁷ *Masante* became even more so “ein Stück streng individualistischer Literatur, eine Art Selbstentblößung.”⁶⁸ Adding a part of his self to his texts, Hildesheimer shifts the abstraction of the absurd to the autobiographically inflected melancholic.

The first fruits of Hildesheimer's new poetics of self-exposure are his *Vergebliche Aufzeichnungen*, written at approximately the same time as his contribution to Kesten's collection, in which he explained that he did not live in

⁶³ Mid-November, 1959, Hildesheimer, *Briefe*, 94f.

⁶⁴ End of November, 1959, *ibid.*, 96.

⁶⁵ Hildesheimer, qtd. in: Jehle, *Werkgeschichte*, 117.

⁶⁶ Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 261. Braese cites Briegleb, “Vergangenheit in der Gegenwart,” 79.

⁶⁷ Hildesheimer, “Antworten über Tynset,” 387.

⁶⁸ Qtd. in: Lea, *Hildesheimers Weg*, 269

Germany because of continuing anti-Semitism there. *Vergebliche Aufzeichnungen* is an essay in which Hildesheimer publicly repositions himself as an author, this time in proximity to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Published in *Die Zeit* in 1962, *Aufzeichnungen* begins with the programmatic sentence, “Mir fällt nichts mehr ein.”⁶⁹ Braese reads the opening line as Hildesheimer’s response to Karl Kraus’ statement, “Mir fällt zu Hitler nichts mehr ein,” which figures in a text in which Kraus articulated his skepticism that literature could be used as weapon against Hitler’s regime.⁷⁰ Without mentioning it by name, Hildesheimer thus establishes the Nazi past as his point of reference. He expands the catastrophe Kraus had signaled with Hitler’s name to a general state of disorientation and loneliness understood as a direct consequence of the Nazi past. In light of this state, all writing must be in vain. This reasoning is Hildesheimer’s point of departure for investigating what possibility of writing remains when no writing can undo a general catastrophe. The essayistic I in *Aufzeichnungen* walks along the beach looking for objects for consideration as an “Ansatzpunkt” (280) for stories. He picks up several—pieces of oilskin and wood—but while they tell of fatal disasters on sea and murderous intrigues on land, none of them offer “Greifbares (...), was sich in die Gedanken einfrisst” (285), and Hildesheimer refuses them all. It is not via concrete objects that he is led to an answer, but via observations, reminiscences, and thought associations, of which three stand out: the first is that “hier nichts von Versuchen einer Bewältigung [zeugt]” (280). The second suggests that there is something that ought to have required attempts at *Bewältigung*: noticing the absence of sea gulls and their cries, Hildesheimer nevertheless hears “ihren schrecklichen Schrei. Mein Ohr ist eine Muschel, die noch lange, zu lange, wiedergibt, was sie früher einmal aufgenommen hat” (281). Whose cries are echoing from the

⁶⁹ Hildesheimer, “Vergebliche Aufzeichnungen,” 275. From now on page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

⁷⁰ Qtd. in: Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 270.

past? The third thought association, sparked at last by a concrete object—a human skull! (278f.)—provides an answer, referring to a doctor from Padua:

Er war vielleicht ein Jude, an der Schädelform kann ich es nicht erkennen, weiß aber, dass es Leute gibt, die es auch unter dem Fleisch noch feststellen können und sich am liebsten ein Leben lang damit beschäftigen, das Fleisch vom Schädel zu schälen, um ihren Drang nach Wissen zu stillen; übrigens eine gesundheitsschonende Beschäftigung, deren Anhänger meist sehr alt werden. (291)

With the assessment of the present in which the past is not examined critically and in which past murderers, who peeled flesh from skulls, live long lives, prosperous and unprosecuted, Hildesheimer appears to affirm his initial skepticism that “[k]ein Stoff mehr, keine Fabel, keine Form” is available to writers (275). Towards the end, however, he mentions that not possibility but *necessity* may be the one valid reason to write: “Notwendigkeit [ist] vielleicht der einzig gültige Beweggrund, die Feder ans Papier zu setzen” (293). It is with this consideration that Hildesheimer decides that the human skull is not the doctor’s, but rather must belong to Yorick, the deceased court jester whose skull is dug up in *Hamlet* and occasions the melancholic prince to contemplate the ephemeral quality of life.⁷¹ This makes Yorick’s skull a quintessential symbol for melancholia for Hildesheimer. In *Aufzeichnungen* Yorick is remembered as follows:

[Er] bediente (...) sich der Weise eines melancholischen und doch zotigen Liedchens, und das scheint mir noch heute die beste, wenn nicht gar die einzige Art zu sein, wie man die Wahrheit einigermaßen überzeugend zum Ausdruck bringen kann: indem man sie still für sich hersingt, wie eine plötzliche, aber nebensächliche Erinnerung einer früheren, halbvergessenen Ahnung; wobei es auf die Melodie ankommt; der Text bildet sich von selbst, dort, wo einer zufällig aufhorcht und sich davon fesseln lässt, oder überhaupt nicht, meist überhaupt nicht. (295)

⁷¹ Cf. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act V, Scene I.

This outline of Hildesheimer's new poetics already includes the blueprint for *Tynset*. To write out of necessity rather than possibility is to conjure up a quiet melancholic song, which attends to memories that are sudden and evoke half-forgotten inklings, in this case, to traumatic memories. Whether the song is audible depends on its aesthetic form, its melody. According to Hildesheimer, the text presents itself to whoever listens attentively and at exactly the right time—or else the text is lost altogether. In *Tynset* the hook of the “y” caught his memory fragments because the narrator paid attention and spun them to a melancholic melody in rondo form.

Following Bachmann's advice and overcoming his fears of adding *Lebenssubstanz* to his writing, Hildesheimer abandoned the theatre of the absurd that too often left the audience “immer weniger betroffen” (Bachmann) and became with *Tynset*, as Domin observed, a political writer. The Bremen speech marks the zenith of Hildesheimer's poetic-political interventions; at no other time did he speak publicly with such vehemence in defense and admiration of the political writer. The second speech that he gave in recognition of an award for *Tynset*, the Büchner prize, is much different, and at this point, ten months after Bremen, Hildesheimer resignedly accepted that the reception of *Tynset*, while positive overall, had refused to grasp the implications of *Entsetzliches* and connect it to the politics of the day.⁷² Domin, who found the publication of *Tynset* to be the most important “jetzt geschriebenen deutschen Prosaband” and who closely identified with Hildesheimer, “weil wir Juden

⁷² How little self-reflection the *Literaturbetrieb* practiced is evidenced by the fact that in 1966 the Darmstadt German Academy for German Language and Poetry also awarded, side-by-side to the Büchner prize, the Sigmund Freud Prize for non-fiction to Emil Staiger. Staiger had been an outspoken proponent of the Nazis' book burnings. Two months after his Darmstadt appearance, in a speech that prompted an enormous literary debate, Staiger asked that Peter Weiss's art be labeled as degenerate (“entartet”). Cf. Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 319f., 330f; Briegleb, *Unmittelbar*, 132-34. For Staiger's text, “Literatur und Öffentlichkeit,” and a (conservative) documentation of the controversy, cf. Erwin Jaeckle, ed. *Der Zürcher Literaturschock. Bericht* (Munich, Vienna: Langen/Müller, 1968). See also Walter Höllerer and Norbert Millers, “Der Zürcher Literaturstreit. Eine Dokumentation,” *Sprache im technischen Zeitalter* 22 (1967); Walter Höllerer and Norbert Millers, “Beginn einer Krise. Zum Zürcher Literaturstreit,” *Sprache im technischen Zeitalter* 26 (1968).

sind,”⁷³ urged him to use the occasion of the Büchner speech to speak out “über die deutsche Situation.” She continued: “Ich hoffe ja sehr, Ihre Büchnerrede wird kein l’art pour l’art. Wir sind verpflichtet, die Plattformen zu nutzen, solange wir sie noch haben.”⁷⁴ Hildesheimer’s speech must have disappointed Domin in this regard; unlike in Bremen, in Darmstadt he did not speak directly about German politics, as “die Höflichkeit er mir verboten [hätte], dieses Thema bis zu seinem Ende zu behandeln.”⁷⁵ His criticism is present nonetheless, but disguised as a reading of Georg Büchner’s political satire *Leonce und Lena* (1836) that Hildesheimer interprets as melancholic play.

Darmstadt: Büchner-Prize

Hildesheimer ascribes much of *Leonce und Lena*’s melancholia to its author. Büchner, who had been persecuted for the publication of *Der Hessische Landbote* (1834), in which he had called for the agrarian population to revolt against its oppressors, lived a conflicted life in exile. Hildesheimer writes:

Der Konflikt wurde durch äußere Umstände verursacht, nicht durch eine innere Konstellation; wir finden keinen Riss im Wesen Büchners. Der Zwiespalt begann nach der Flucht aus Darmstadt, als sein Antrieb und sein Drang zur Aktion erlahmt waren, als seine Hoffnung sich zu Enttäuschung und schließlich zur Resignation wandelte, als er seiner—von je latenten—Melancholie zumindest ein Theaterstück lang freien Lauf ließ. Auch Büchner hat schließlich eingesehen, dass er und seinesgleichen das Rad der Geschichte nicht drehen würden, dass Leute seines Schlages die Politik nicht ändern, dass er es mit den Mächtigen nicht aufnehmen konnte. Dass der freie Geist in Deutschland nicht willkommen ist, auch bei den Unfreien nicht. Sein Traum war ausgeträumt, und so flüchtete er für kurze Zeit in einen anderen Traum. Dieser Traum hieß „Leonce und Lena“, er ist ein melancholisches Meisterwerk, eine Tragikomödie des Leerlaufs und der Frustration. (33)

⁷³ Domin, letter to Hildesheimer, April 10, 1965, Hildesheimer, *Briefe*, 135.

⁷⁴ Domin, letter to Hildesheimer, September 29, 1966, WHA 381. Qtd. in: Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 319n297.

⁷⁵ Hildesheimer, “Büchners atemlose Melancholie,” 42.

Much like *Tynset*'s narrator and thus, if we believe that Hildesheimer identifies with his narrator, Hildesheimer himself, Büchner had been latently melancholic all along in this description, but it was the conflict from outside—persecution, flight, exile—that converted latent melancholia into manifest melancholia because Büchner realized that “Leute seines Schlages”—writers, victims of political persecution, and, for Hildesheimer, Jews in Germany—were powerless and without influence in either politics or history. According to Hildesheimer, the realization that an open mind was unwelcome in Germany led Büchner to write a melancholic masterpiece. He struck out because of his “bittere(n) Erkenntnis, dass in Deutschland Selbstlosigkeit, Gerechtigkeitwille und Integrität nicht zu den Qualifikationen gehören, die zur Verwirklichung eines politischen Zieles beitragen” (42). These words echo Hildesheimer's documentation of his own reasons for leaving Germany; he wrote *Tynset* after he left the country that he had identified as anti-Semitic, intolerant, and uninterested.

Only at the end of the speech does Hildesheimer draw a parallel between Büchner and contemporary society. “Zwar wird, wer die Wahrheit sagt, nicht mehr gehenkt, aber er wird auch nicht gehört. Die Resignation vor dieser Tatsache, denke ich, wäre heute wie damals ein Grund zur Flucht in die Poesie.” Though a consequence of resignation, the flight into poetics is identified by Hildesheimer as flight *from* politics, saying of whomever condemns such flight, “[dass] der (...) die deutsche Wirklichkeit nicht begriffen [hat]” (42). This is the most direct attack on German politics in the speech, which Hildesheimer ends on an almost apologetic note: he did not say “die letzten Worte (...) weil sich hier die Gelegenheit *bot*, sondern weil sie sich *aufdrängte*” (42).

If Büchner's flight from politics ended in a melancholic play, does this imply that *Tynset* resulted from Hildesheimer's own flight from politics? Neither *Tynset* nor *Leonce und Leona* is apolitical; rather, these works are highly political. Neither Büchner nor Hildesheimer was uninterested in politics, but both authors resigned in the face of its overwhelming status quo. Their characters were inert and passive; by these signs Hildesheimer recognizes the melancholia of *Leonce und Lena* and, by extension, of his own narrator. In Büchner's play and in *Tynset* the plot is not driven by dialogue; every sentence, Hildesheimer diagnoses for *Leonce und Lena*, operates as a retarding element. Speech is an end in itself, "aber das vergisst man über dem Reichtum an Einfällen" (35). Despite the apparent inertia,

offenbart sich [überall] zugleich die Hast, das Atemlose, Überhitzte, das gleichsam Fiebrige des Autors, der manches zu überspielen hat und in Eile ist: er muss disponieren, drängen, muss aus seinen seismographischen Feststellungen ein Stenogramm machen, muss in Stichworten Unaussprechliches, Hintergründiges beschwören. (...) [Schon hier] ersetzen Satzketten ganze Sätze und werden gerade durch ihre Kürze zu genialischen Würfeln, jederzeit verfügbar und jederzeit verworfbar: sogar die Paralipomena sind voller Schätze. Und alles, Sätze, Ketten, Bilder, ist in tiefe Melancholie gehüllt. Nun schafft die Darstellung der Melancholie stets eine Verzauberung, denn sie bedeutet Abgewandtheit von den realen Dingen des Lebens, die ja für den Melancholiker nicht real, weil allzu vergänglich sind. Melancholische Lethargie (...) ist ein vollwertiger Ersatz für Aktion. (36)

This description fits *Leonce und Lena* as well as *Tynset*. Hildesheimer's prototype of the melancholic is also the mirror image of *Tynset*'s narrator: "Der Melancholiker (...) greift nicht ins Geschehen ein, er bleibt passiv und lässt sich treiben. Er wandelt wie im Schlaf und schafft sich (...) Ersatz durch Tagträume." But unlike the melancholic's audience, which enjoys these digressions, the melancholic experiences them as "Misslingen" of the task to develop his seismographic observations. This failure in turn creates more melancholia (36). The melancholic appears inert and apolitical; after

all, his melancholic lethargy is his only “Aktion.” The point of the Büchner speech, however, is that this inertia is the consequence of a certain historical constellation, and that the state of melancholia in itself—inaction, inertia—expresses protest against its cause. By protesting against the circumstance of its own formation, melancholia becomes political. The melancholic cannot act socio-politically herself; she is trapped in a dynamic of endless mourning and resignation. But her melancholia culminates in the exhortation to others to work through on her behalf. In the postwar environment of suppression and denial, this call is intrinsically political, even though it might not produce results of political consequence.

The melancholic aspect in *Tynset* was widely acknowledged, but its political register by and large was not. Though the product of the steady radicalization of Hildesheimer’s political conceptualization of literature, *Tynset* was only an early result, one that was often accused of and later dismissed as being too formalistic by the *Literaturbetrieb*.⁷⁶ Having cautioned that Germany “dem Faschismus wieder [zutreibe],” Hildesheimer took the anti-authoritarian movement of the mid-1960s as an occasion to speak to students on the political engagement of a leftist author. In this movement students and other members of the left sought to redefine the concept of fascism by applying it to Germany, Israel, and the United States alike without necessarily working critically through the concrete historical example of National Socialism.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ A “Vorwurf des Formalismus” was often voiced against Hildesheimer in connection with *Tynset*, cf. Hildesheimer and Durzak, “Potentielles Ich,” 291. The accusation may have stemmed from Hildesheimer’s *Pastorale*, a play he coined his “Bekenntnis zum Formalismus.” Hildesheimer explained that *Pastorale* was “um der Form willen geschrieben, um des reinen Spiels willen.” Wolfgang Hildesheimer, “Die Entstehung des *Pastorale*,” in Wolfgang Hildesheimer, *Gesammelte Werke in sieben Bänden. Bd. VI Theaterstücke*, ed. Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig and Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 817. Because of its rondo form, *Tynset* was similarly discussed as formalistic play.

⁷⁷ For a discussion of Hans Magnus Enzensberger’s question whether Germany was “faschistisch, prä-faschistisch, neo-faschistisch oder faschistoid,” voiced in one of the cornerstone texts of the movement, *Gemeinplätze*, and the resulting controversy that ensued between Enzensberger and Arendt, cf. Braese,

The Frankfurt Lectures: Recommendations for a Poetics of Remembrance

In the summer semester of 1967 Hildesheimer gave a series of three lectures at Frankfurt University in his capacity as the ninth docent of the Frankfurt Lectures on Poetics. This was one of only two occasions when Hildesheimer espoused a literary theory.⁷⁸ Collectively entitled “Aspekte und Grenzen der dichterischen Freiheit,” Hildesheimer’s individual lectures returned to the topic of the absurd (first and third lectures) and “Reaktionäre” Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. In none of the lectures does Hildesheimer explicitly state his opinion on the political and literary events of the day—neither on the student movement, which after the death of student protester Benno Ohnesorg three weeks earlier had undergone a process of radicalization, nor on the controversial Princeton meeting of Group 47.⁷⁹ However, he formulates a poetics opposed to the practice of the *Literaturbetrieb*. Because the poetics he outlines is informed by a politics of memory that was then controversial, Hildesheimer essentially makes a political argument, albeit one disguised as “subjektive Empfindung.”⁸⁰

Die andere Erinnerung, 321-29; Klaus Briegleb, 1968. *Literatur der antiautoritären Bewegung* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1993).

⁷⁸ Fischer publishing house sponsored the Frankfurt lectures annually from 1959-68; since 1979 Suhrkamp has been the main organizer. The list of docents includes the most prominent of German writers, among them many Group 47 members, e.g., Ingeborg Bachmann, Heinrich Böll, Günter Grass, and Martin Walser. Hildesheimer said in a 1976 interview that the lectures were the only time, “dass ich versucht habe, mich theoretisch mit Literatur zu beschäftigen,” Hildesheimer and Durzak, “Potentielles Ich,” 295. This is not quite correct, as the 1975 speech, “The End of Fiction,” in many ways serves as a sequel to the first Frankfurt lecture. Wolfgang Hildesheimer, “The End of Fiction,” in *Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Gesammelte Werke in sieben Bänden. Bd. VII, Vermischte Schriften*, ed. Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig and Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 125-40.

⁷⁹ Cf. Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 329. At the 1966 Group 47 meeting in Princeton, the youngest author present, first-timer Peter Handke, lashed out against established writers for writing decorative prose; he accused them of “Beschreibungsimpotenz” vis-à-vis reality. This incidence initiated a well-publicized literary debate. Cf. several documents by Jochen Ernst, Hans Schwab-Felisch, Fritz J. Raddatz, Walter Höllerer, and Horst Krüger in Reinhard Lettau, ed. *Die Gruppe 47. Bericht--Kritik--Polemik* (Neuwied, Berlin: Luchterhand, 1967), 401-45. Parkes and White, eds., *The Gruppe 47*, 142f. Hildesheimer discussed the possibility of his own participation in Princeton with Böll before rejecting Richter’s invitation, cf. Hildesheimer, *Briefe*, 143, 146f.

⁸⁰ Hildesheimer, “Frankfurter Poetik-Vorlesungen,” 45, cf. 43. From not on page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

Hildesheimer stakes out a clear position vis-à-vis the German cultural sphere by declaring that he has nothing in common with Emil Staiger, recipient of the other prize awarded in Darmstadt in 1966. There is no need for Hildesheimer to clarify this comment; the literary controversy surrounding Staiger's thinly veiled opinion that Peter Weiss's art was *entartet*, which replicated Nazi rhetoric regarding modern and Jewish art, had been the “*die literaturpolitische Debatte der letzten Monate*.”⁸¹ Hildesheimer distances himself from Staiger's opinion and also from the *Literaturbetrieb's* bestowal of honors upon a Jewish writer together with a former Nazi sympathizer. This practice proved in Hildesheimer's mind that “die Dimension Auschwitz” was missing in the “Wirklichkeit” of German authors (57).

Reality—*Wirklichkeit*—is the topic of the first lecture in Frankfurt, and Hildesheimer takes his cue from a statement made by his friend, the much admired poet Günter Eich. In a speech given ten years earlier, Eich had said that it was through writing that “Dinge Wirklichkeit [erlangen]. Sie [=Wirklichkeit] ist nicht meine Voraussetzung, sondern mein Ziel. Ich muss sie erst herstellen.”⁸² Hildesheimer agrees with Eich's polemic against novels whose authors assume they know what reality is (49). Both writers instead favor a riddle, something unknown that needs to be deciphered. While the process of deciphering may be “eine ewige Quelle des Unbehagens, wenn nicht der *Trauer*,” it is also the source of all creativity (50, emphasis mine). With the mention of “Trauer” Hildesheimer connects the work of mourning with the absurd, which he summarizes as a situation in which “[d]er Mensch fragt [und] [d]ie Welt schweigt” (50). The author's true object, Hildesheimer continues, must be “die Darstellung des Menschen, der fragt, und der Welt, die

⁸¹ Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 71n.

⁸² Günter Eich, “Der Schriftsteller vor der Realität,” in *Günter Eich, Gesammelte Schriften. Bd. 4, Vermischte Schriften*, ed. Ilse Aichinger and Susanne Müller-Hanpft (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1973), 613f. Qtd. in: Hildesheimer, “Frankfurter Poetik-Vorlesungen,” 48.

schweigt oder, um das Schweigen zu übertönen, ihre mannigfachen irreführenden Ersatzantworten erteilt” (54). Therein lies the author’s “Engagement” (43). To illustrate his point, Hildesheimer reads Samuel Beckett’s *Molloy* (an example Eich had also used).⁸³ The narrator Molloy confronts the silence of the world, manifest in absurd ersatz responses, and slowly disintegrates: “Er registriert die Symptome der Welt, unter denen er sich einmal einzurichten versucht hat, und er erzählt, wie sie ihm, eines nach dem anderen, abhanden kommen, wie er stetig an Boden verliert” (56). Beckett describes the failure of an individual but offers no hint as to how to stop the process of losing ground. The *Wirklichkeit* that *Molloy* constructs is a reality void of utopian promise. Herein Hildesheimer sees the link between *Molloy* and postwar Germany: reality has lost the promise of a future for Jewish victims of the Holocaust. The postwar world is emptied of meaning, but filling the void with ersatz noise is inadequate.

From this short discussion of the novel—a term Hildesheimer avoids for novels like *Molloy* that capture but also create *Wirklichkeit*, reserving for them instead the term “Gedicht” to indicate that narrative closure is impossible for life after the Holocaust—he swiftly shifts to Adorno’s dictum that to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric. But he turns the dictum on its head, arguing that “nach Auschwitz *nur* noch das Gedicht möglich sei, dazu allerdings auch die dem Gedicht verwandte ‘absurde Prosa.’” He continues:

Ich möchte weiterhin behaupten, dass nach Auschwitz der Roman nicht mehr möglich sei. Auschwitz und ähnliche Stätten haben das menschliche Bewusstsein erweitert, sie haben ihm eine Dimension hinzugefügt, die vorher kaum als Möglichkeit bestand. Diese Dimension zu berücksichtigen, steht nicht in der Macht des Romans

⁸³ Beckett’s 1951 novel gained critical attention for its unconventional plot that is revealed by the inner monologues of two characters, bedridden Molloy and private detective Moran. Certain stylistic parallels between *Tynset* and *Molloy* are obvious but, to my knowledge, have not yet been examined. Samuel Beckett, *Molloy* (New York: Grove Press, 1955).

(...). Aber die Wirklichkeit ist andererseits ohne diese Dimension nicht mehr denkbar und—wenn sie überhaupt jemals darstellbar war—nicht mehr darstellbar. Das Gedicht aber und jene Romane, die Eich zu den Gedichten zählt, also Beckett, stellen Wirklichkeit her, schaffen sie also nicht aus jenem präfabrizierten Material, in dem Auschwitz vielleicht nicht enthalten ist, sondern aus Elementen des Bewusstseins, in dem die Dimension Auschwitz enthalten ist (...). Und wenn sie im Bewusstsein nicht enthalten ist, so ist sie ins Unterbewusste gesunken, sie gehört zum *inneren Mikrokosmos des Dichters*. Er kann—und sollte—sich *auf diese Dimension verlassen*. (...) Ich trete nicht für den Konzentrationslagerroman ein, nicht für den Roman über Kollektivschuld und Sühne, auch das wären Teilaspekte [dieser Dimension, die der Roman, indem er nur ihre Aspekte behandelt, bagatellisiert], sondern für das *weite Panorama eines an allen Schrecken und Grauen, an aller Tragik und Komik des Lebens geschulten Bewusstseins*, und dafür kann der Roman nicht der Ort sein, denn er konstruiert den Einzelfall und bietet ihn dem Leser zur Identifikation an. (57f., emphasis mine)

Hildesheimer posits here that Auschwitz, because it has entered human consciousness and unconsciousness and thus altered *Wirklichkeit*, must also affect literature. Novels that aim to represent reality build on a dimension that excludes Auschwitz or, even if they include aspects of that reality, perhaps by describing concentration camps or arguing the guilt question, focus on particulars at the expense of a catastrophic whole and thus trivialize it. According to Hildesheimer, reality is no longer thinkable without Auschwitz, but only certain kinds of literature can create the reality that includes the dimension of Auschwitz. The Holocaust confronted human conscious- and unconsciousness so fully that reality now presents itself as a riddle requiring deciphering: Auschwitz and existence after Auschwitz form the riddle. Because there are no satisfactory answers, but only ersatz noise or silence, the writer must lend expression to the disorientation experienced in a world that lacks coherence. She cannot plausibly represent reality in fiction by drawing on conventional narrative techniques that lead to closure. The poem after Auschwitz—Eich and Hildesheimer's use of the term encompasses some novels and absurd prose—must make the silence

audible: “Man könnte sich an der Qualität der Fragen aufrichten, wie sie das Schweigen der Welt hörbar machen, wenn nicht gar zum *Dröhnen* bringen” (61, emphasis mine). While there is no promise of success, this “Dichtung” hopes “das Rezeptionsvermögen zu erweitern und das Bewusstsein (...) zu schärfen, (...) anstatt das Geschehen der Zeit durch fiktives Geschehen zu ergänzen” (61). This is the extent to which Hildesheimer is able to answer a normative and, according to him, “*die* wesentliche Frage an die Literatur,” that is, whether or not literature is capable of changing a person (60). Rather than responding in the affirmative, he cautiously states that if a text sharpens the consciousness for the dimension in which Auschwitz is included, literature “wäre (...) zumindest nicht vergeblich” (61).

Hildesheimer does not dismiss the novel as such. But he insists that in order to pay tribute to reality, to the dimension that includes Auschwitz, novelists must bring to expression the permeation of the present by a murderous past that registers for many as incommunicable. This should not be confused with the Holocaust’s unspeakability, a notion that clouds much postwar discussion. Instead it refers to the affective disorientation in the present of those who experienced Nazi crimes as victims. The writer who acknowledges the dimension that includes Auschwitz also acknowledges this affective disorientation and must account for it by bringing it to the fore. The writer draws on her inner microcosm, which always, consciously or not, entails knowledge of Auschwitz, along with the vast number of impressions and experiences that account for life’s tragic moments as well as comical ones (58). She must trust this microcosm; it is the source of the writing process, which gives form to what is already present in her (un-) consciousness. According to Hildesheimer, her efforts help others to recognize the dimension that includes Auschwitz. The recognition and acknowledgement of Auschwitz is hoped to bring about interest in

socio-political involvement and thus affect politics. The writer's *Engagement* in changing her readers' attitude is thus the political mission of literature.⁸⁴

Hildesheimer names examples of authors who master an articulation of *Wirklichkeit*: in the first lecture he lists Paul Celan, Ingeborg Bachmann, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, and, of course, Günter Eich; in the third he also discusses Ilse Aichinger and Peter Weiss. Reading their works selectively, he concludes that much of literature's effect depends not on the author but on the reader: successful post-Auschwitz literature "stellt einen Anspruch auf [sic] die *Assoziationsfähigkeit* des Lesers" (85, emphasis mine). The reader must follow chains of association that, while building upon each other, move further and further away from the actual theme. This movement mirrors what Hildesheimer promotes as the successful interpretation of fragmented memories, which also operates via associations that bring fragments into relationship with each other. With each association, even those leading away from the point of conception, another unconscious element is examined and illuminated (91). If the reader is willing to submit to and follow chains of associations, and if in the process he is encouraged to examine his own memory fragments, his awareness will be sharpened for the Auschwitz dimension of reality. In successful literature, what is articulated is "Verzweiflung (...) als kontinuierliche Lebenshaltung," not to propagate despair as the only adequate response to Auschwitz, but to lead to the recognition "der Unaufhebbarkeit alles Zweifels" (98). *Verzweiflung* describes for Hildesheimer a continuous process of doubting and the concomitant critical examination that unfolds new associative chains for further critical exploration, thereby widening one's consciousness and allowing Auschwitz to arise from the unconscious and provoke a reaction to newly acquired awareness, which translates into socio-political action.

⁸⁴ Hildesheimer's concept of literature's function thus changed: in 1952, he had attributed to literature the attempt to remedy society's shortcomings; by 1967, literature lost this function for Hildesheimer.

With the Frankfurt lectures Hildesheimer articulates what he believes to be literature's purpose and its potential impact. Inherent in his insistence that reality reflected in literature must include the dimension of the Holocaust is a politically charged demand to work towards a memory culture conscious of others' suffering (Jewish suffering in particular), but the Frankfurt lectures were not predominantly political. Except for expressing doubt that literature, even if otherwise effective, would ever reach the conscience of politicians (60), thus repeating his earlier statement regarding the incommensurability of writers and politicians, Hildesheimer does not engage in a political conversation vis-à-vis current events, at least not directly.⁸⁵

His direct call to authors to produce literature reflecting reality should have been met by members of the *Literaturbetrieb* with enthusiasm. In the atmosphere of revolt and political unrest, of the winter of 1967/68, literary debates brought attention to the connection between literature and politics, demanding, in the words of Martin Walser, "kritische und damit *realistische*" literature.⁸⁶ The criterion of importance was the same for both Walser and Hildesheimer: the reflection or representation of reality. Yet Walser's call for realistic literature did not refer to a reality that was marked by the Holocaust. It referred instead to the reality of the workplace. In 1961, Group 61 formed to promote political aspects of labor as literary theme, intended not as the

⁸⁵ At the time he delivered the Frankfurt lectures, Hildesheimer took a much more political position in his open letter to Peter Weiss. In response to the Six-Day War of June 1967, Weiss had accused the Israeli government and military of "Mentalität eines Herrenvolkes." Although Weiss emphasized his overall solidarity with Israel, Hildesheimer appealed to Weiss's Jewishness as well as arguing from the standpoint of his own to vehemently defend the position of the state of Israel against Weiss's accusation. Braese summarizes their exchange, which, not only because it was the first public postwar disagreement of two German-speaking Jews but especially because it was on the topic of Israel, attracted a large audience and urged others to join the discussion on Israel. Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 339-48; Weiss qtd. in: Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 340. Hildesheimer's open letter earned him the respect of Adorno, who entered into correspondence with Hildesheimer as a result, cf. Hildesheimer, *Briefe*, 152f. Several others congratulated Hildesheimer on his open letter and thanked him for his frankness, among them Aichinger, Eich, Walter Jens, and Erich Fried. Cf. *ibid.*, 153-57.

⁸⁶ Martin Walser, "Wie und wovon handelt Literatur," in *Wie und wovon handelt Literatur. Aufsätze und Reden* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1973), 119-38, here 120. Emphasis mine. Qtd. in: Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 384.

successor to Group 47, but as a political alternative aiming to encourage political involvement among the workforce. The group radicalized during the sixties and, because of internal conflicts among members, regrouped as *Werkkreis Literatur der Arbeitswelt* in 1969.⁸⁷ Walser was an ardent proponent of *Werkkreis*, calling its three text collections published by the time of Walser's writing "die wichtigsten Anthologien seit 1945."⁸⁸ In contrast to progressive *Arbeitswelt* literature Walser construed formalistic literature as conservative. In reference to Hildesheimer's works Braese concludes from his reading of Walser's text and Walser's definition of formalistic (or mannerist) literature the following: Walser discounted the practice by which the author's "Bewusstseinsattitüde" rather than material reality determined the content of literature.⁸⁹ The author's attitude, Hildesheimer's microcosm, produces variations of what Walser considered Hildesheimer's endless theme, "dass nichts mehr kommt und nichts mehr geht." Referring to Beckett and, by extension, literary modernism, Walser dismissed "ebendieses ganze Endspielspiel [sic]."⁹⁰ Walser here referred to *Endgame*, one of Beckett's most influential works.⁹¹ Adorno took *Endgame* as an expression of melancholic contemplation, as *Endgame* essentially acknowledged metaphysical meaninglessness. Understanding *Endgame*, Adorno wrote, "can mean only understanding its unintelligibility, concretely reconstructing the meaning of the fact that is has no meaning."⁹² Elsewhere Adorno wrote in reference to *Endgame*:

⁸⁷ For a succinct history of Group 61 and *Werkkreis*, cf. Ralf Schnell, "Die Politisierung der Literatur (1960-1968)," in *Die Literatur der Bundesrepublik* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1986), 116-227; Gundel Mattenklott, "Literatur von unten--die andere Kultur," in *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literature. Bd. 12, Gegenwartsliteratur seit 1968*, ed. Klaus Briegleb and Sigrid Weigel (München: C. Hanser, 1992), 153-81, here 154-58.

⁸⁸ Walser, "Wie und wovon handelt Literatur," 125.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 120.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 121.

⁹¹ Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (New York: Grove Press, 1958).

⁹² Theodor W. Adorno, "Trying to Understand Endgame," in *Notes to Literature, vol. 1* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 241-75, here 243.

Beckett's plays are absurd not because of the absence of meaning, for then they would be simply irrelevant, but because they put meaning on trial; they unfold its history. His work is ruled as much by an obsession with positive nothingness as by the obsession with a meaninglessness that has developed historically.⁹³

Walser strongly resisted Adorno's admiration of Beckett. He equated a conservative, elitist mannerism with the notion of meaninglessness that for Adorno manifested itself historically because of Auschwitz. In so doing Walser dismissed it entirely. Many of those whose ears still rang with Adorno's dictum that to write poetry after Auschwitz was barbaric, which had influenced every discussion of postwar literature, sought refuge in realistic literature (as proposed by Walser) to resist Adorno actively. Hildesheimer, on the other hand, was affected positively by Adorno; his Frankfurt lectures, in which he defends absurd prose and expands on Adorno's dictum, say as much. For literature to remain true to *Wirklichkeit* after Auschwitz, it had to forswear establishing meaning as a closed structure.

Comparison of Hildesheimer and Walser shows that, though both authors articulated a need for a politicized literature, they followed two different political agendas: one of remembering the past, in melancholic reflection on meaninglessness and continuous doubting, and one of suppressing the past, by emptying the present of a certain past and focusing on contemporary concerns as if disconnected from earlier events, especially genocide.

Hildesheimer's Microcosm: *Masante*

In an important 1976 interview Hildesheimer remembers his literary beginnings as "eine unbeschwerte Zeit," not only in the context of writing, "sondern überhaupt."⁹⁴ Entirely different from the period of *Lieblose Legenden* was his

⁹³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London: Athlone, 1999), 153.

⁹⁴ Durzak, *Gespräche über den Roman*, 274.

“Tynset-Masante-Phase,” which marked “das Ende des ‘straight forward’-Erzählens” because such narration had, at that point, lost its “Berechtigung.”⁹⁵ After the publication of *Masante*, Hildesheimer explains this development as follows:

Wie gesagt, die Bewusstseinssebene des Ich-Erzählers hat sich geändert, meiner Meinung nach erweitert, und nun sind diese Elemente vorhanden, die in „Tynset“ ja auch schon angedeutet sind: als Element der Angst. (...) Das sind alles Überbleibsel von Erfahrungen aus meiner Tätigkeit als Dolmetscher bei den Nürnberger Prozessen. Sie brauchten diese lange Strecke—über die „Lieblosen Legenden“ und über „Tynset“—um dann schließlich in völlig transponierter Form wieder zum Ausdruck zu kommen.⁹⁶

It is often suggested that Hildesheimer used painting as a means of psychic defense during his employment at the Nuremberg trials, and that the process of writing demanded he lower his defenses.⁹⁷ After writing *Masante*, a process that took eight years, Hildesheimer contrasts painting with writing, emphasizing that painting was a “Flucht” that allowed him to forget: “Ich bin bei ‘der Sache’ und nicht bei der Verarbeitung eines Themas.” Writing, by comparison, was a *compulsive* processing of a theme; it is “ein eigentümlicher Zwang.”⁹⁸ As the culmination of a compulsion to process his Nuremberg experiences, Hildesheimer wrote *Masante*, his most political prose work. Although *Masante* may be read as a sequel to *Tynset*—the narrator is identical, and he refers to some of the same characters—*Masante* is “ein Buch von

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 292f.

⁹⁷ Cf. Henninger, “Über ex(-)territoriales Schreiben,” 8-16.

⁹⁸ Wolfgang Hildesheimer, “Es gelingt mir längst nicht alles,” in *Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Gesammelte Werke in sieben Bänden. Bd. VII Vermischte Schriften*, ed. Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig and Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 747. In 1984 Hildesheimer expressed a similar sentiment, this time in reference to the looming environmental catastrophe: “Wenn ich am Arbeitstisch sitze und Collagen mache oder zeichne, dann verliere ich das Gefühl für jede Zeit und auch für unsere Zeit. Wenn ich aber am Schreibtisch sitze und nachdenke, dann guckt mich das bare Entsetzen an über unsere Zeit und unsere Lage, so dass ich absolut gelähmt bin.” *Stern* interview, qtd. in: Klaus Briegleb, “Weiterschreiben! Wege zu einer deutschen literarischen ‘Postmoderne’?” in *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur. Bd. 12, Gegenwartsliteratur seit 1968*, ed. Klaus Briegleb and Sigrid Weigel (München: C. Hanser, 1992), 340-81, here 351.

heute, und zwar ein politisches Buch” and thus differs from *Tynset*, at least in the assessment of Hildesheimer, for whom *Tynset* was primarily a melancholic monologue and highly personal. *Masante*, in contrast to *Tynset*’s “Melancholie” and its adherence to “rein Persönliche[m],” “ist wesentlich realer und realistischer, auch härter, komischer, aber nicht lustiger.”⁹⁹ However, the level of realism does not account for the novel’s political dimension, which lies not in *Masante*’s composition as a collection of realistic narratives, “sondern gerade in dem, was dazwischen steht, in der Beschreibung der Verfassung des Ich-Erzählers.”¹⁰⁰ The same is true for *Tynset*, a book that Domin had identified as political in its own right. Whereas Hildesheimer remembers *Tynset* primarily for its rondo form and embedded narratives, which distract “notwendigerweise den Leser vom Zentralthema des Buches,” its central theme, after all, is *Entsetzliches*.¹⁰¹ *Masante*, too, includes multiple narratives, but its formalistic principle is different. The stories are much shorter, unfinished, and inserted into the text at different points as fragments. Rather than the carefully structured rondo form, which included several independent, closed narratives, a much more arbitrary “Zettelkasten” drives the narratives in *Masante*.¹⁰²

Besides embedded narratives and the framing narrative coexisting in this way in an “uncertain relationship” in *Masante*,¹⁰³ the outstanding formal difference between *Tynset* and *Masante* is that in the latter the narrator seeks a dialogue partner. *Masante* is not a monologue, as Hildesheimer had characterized its predecessor. In *Masante*, the narrator has a desire to communicate, to establish contact with another person, and to exchange ideas. According to Hildesheimer, *Masante* is more of a novel

⁹⁹ Hildesheimer and Prangel, “Interview mit Wolfgang Hildesheimer,” 5.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² The “Zettelkasten” principle is just as strictly composed as the rondo form: “Aus dem Zettelkasten ergibt sich eine anscheinend willkürlichere Komposition, die in Wirklichkeit gar nicht willkürlich ist,” *ibid.*

¹⁰³ Long, “Power, Desire,” 602.

in this regard: “Es ist ohne Zweifel mehr Roman geworden, als ‘Tynset’ es gewesen ist.”¹⁰⁴ Hildesheimer did not plan to return to the novel after the Frankfurt lectures; he did not want to go “zurück zum Roman.”¹⁰⁵ Despite the inclusion of dialogue, the establishment of a goal for the narrator, and his documentation of the narrator’s quest to achieve this end, Hildesheimer still did not return to the conventional novel he had criticized in Frankfurt. Even the novelistic elements of *Masante*, for instance the dialogues between the narrator and Maxine, the keeper of the inn at which he stays, follow *Tynset*’s principle of associations and demand that the reader work with the text, thus sharpening her awareness for the Auschwitz dimension of reality. This dimension is as present in *Masante* as it is in *Tynset*, perhaps even more so. In a conversation about *Masante*, Hildesheimer repeats his Frankfurt guidelines for politically engaged literature dedicated to the representation of *Wirklichkeit* as containing a dimension of Auschwitz: the driving force of prose is not formal play but the author’s inner microcosm conveyed by formal means. Unless the inner microcosm already contains the writer’s “Programm, sein ideologisches oder sein existentielles Programm,” form alone will not amount to political engagement:

Das Schreiben selbst ist ein bewusster Vorgang, bei dem man auf das Kompositorische, das Stilistische achten muss und nicht auf irgendwelche persönlichen Dinge. Man muss sich darauf verlassen können, dass das eigene Ich, das ideologische Ich, das existentielle Ich, automatisch beim Schreiben zum Vorschein kommt. Man darf es nicht bewusst hervorzerren. Ich kann nicht Missstände anprangern, indem ich sie tatsächlich erwähne, ich darf nicht die wahren Missstände erwähnen. Ich muss Parallelen ziehen, und ich muss mich darauf verlassen können, dass sie tatsächlich so wirken, wie sie gemeint sind: als ein Element meiner inneren Konstitution. (...) Formale Bewältigung ist das Vehikel, auf dem das automatisch ins Werk fließende Bewusstsein des Ich-Erzählers sich bewegt.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Hildesheimer and Durzak, "Potentielles Ich," 287.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 291f.

Political engagement by an author is not, as Hildesheimer states elsewhere, writing a book about Vietnam: the description of factual events and causal relation is not the business of a writer, who deals with fiction.¹⁰⁷ The form fiction takes is the result of a writer's conscious deliberations; what comes to articulation is his inner microcosm, which exists independent of form. Asked whether *Masante* is "das Äußerste an Engagement (...), was man mit Literatur leisten sollte," Hildesheimer responds that he at least exhausted his possibilities for combining the political with the literary.¹⁰⁸ Any further steps towards the political would lead away from literature. "Engagement muss sein," he says elsewhere, but he chose to be a writer, not a journalist: "Ich bin leider nicht zum homo politicus geboren, ich kann nur hoffen, dass der innere Mikrokosmos ein Bestandteil von mir ist, der sich automatisch und damit auch in allen Fiktionen äußert. Wenn er sich nicht äußert, gut, dann bin ich gescheitert."¹⁰⁹ Because his inner microcosm contains the experience of Nazi persecution, his "Beitrag zur Bewusstseinsweiterung" is not only colored by it but marks its defining characteristic.¹¹⁰

Coming to Terms with Schrecken

Not much happens in *Masante*. The insomniac narrator of *Tynset*, now fifty-two years old,¹¹¹ has arrived in Meona, a settlement on the edge of a desert, and he moves back and forth between his room and a bar that are both part of an inn called "la dernière chance." The name is a pun on the location of the bar; less obviously, it alludes to the narrator's final attempt to find the least populated place possible where he might write and give testimony (341, 348). The plot spans the afternoon and

¹⁰⁷ Hildesheimer and Prangel, "Interview mit Wolfgang Hildesheimer," 6.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰⁹ Hildesheimer and Kesting, "Ende der Fiktionen," 64.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Hildesheimer, *Masante*, 169. From now on page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

evening of one day, July 1 (158), and the following night, during which the narrator interacts with Maxine and Alain, the innkeepers and, briefly, an Irish policeman or military serviceman who frequents the bar. Asked about “das Hauptthema” of *Tynset*, Hildesheimer replied “das Entsetzliche.”¹¹² Of *Masante* he says, it is “das Buch eines Scheiternden, der dem *Schrecken* nichts entgegenzusetzen hat.”¹¹³ At the end of *Tynset* the narrator is still functioning; at the end of *Masante*, he has vanished into the desert.

The goal of the narrator’s travel is described only vaguely and is not fully discernible. At first the only clear explanation the narrator gives is to be away from Masante, his home in the Italian Renaissance city of Urbino.¹¹⁴ Meona is “Fluchtpunkt und Kontrapunkt zu Masante” (165), and that is the location’s sole value. The narrator appears to be on the run from “Schrecken” that overcame him at Masante. In Meona, he predicts, “Dinge” should lose “ihren Schrecken” (174). Because of his distance to Masante, the narrator believes he will be able, “Früheres abzustreifen” (174). Although he defends his reasons for leaving Masante (186), he leaves them unnamed. He arrives in Meona “unter dem ewigen Vorwand des Suchens nach bestimmten Dimensionen der Distanz” (216) and to settle accounts with other places, including, presumably, Masante, although there are in fact “viele” (186). For roughly the first quarter of the book, it thus seems as if the narrator were haunted in Masante by memories of earlier events (“Früheres”) and the horror (“Schrecken”) that attached not only to the past but also to the present. In Meona he hopes to create distance to both the setting of the horror and the horror itself.

¹¹² Hildesheimer, “Antworten über Tynset,” 385.

¹¹³ Wolfgang Hildesheimer and Dieter E. Zimmer, “Gespräch mit dem Autor: Wolfgang Hildesheimer. Rückzug aus der Zeit,” *Die Zeit*, April 13, 1973. Emphasis mine.

¹¹⁴ For several years Hildesheimer owned a house outside Urbino, named Cal Masante, and there he wrote most of *Masante*. Wolfgang Hildesheimer, “Abschied von Masante,” in *Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Gesammelte Werke in sieben Bänden. Bd. VII Vermischte Schriften*, ed. Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig and Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 705-11. Cf. a short prose piece, dated 1969, in which Hildesheimer developed some of the themes of *Masante*: Wolfgang Hildesheimer, “Cal Masante,” in *Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Gesammelte Werke in sieben Bänden, Bd. II, Monologische Prosa*, ed. Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig and Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 398-410.

Throughout the rest of the text, however, this initial logic—to get away from Masante because it provokes and gives home to *Schrecken*—evolves and turns out to be pretext (“Vorwand”). The narrator ultimately seeks distance from Masante in order to desire its *presence*; in the condition of “Nicht-zuhause-Sein” (173) he begins “mir Masante von fern heranzuträumen” (229). In fact, he seeks distance from Masante only to examine it and its horrors *closely*. Being in Meona, “ein extremer Ort, außerhalb der Welt von Masante” (247), encourages his mind to wander independently and to invite back into his consciousness those images that he had tried to forget in Masante (341, 347). The actual goal of his trip reveals itself to be the narrator’s wish and need to write. Near the end of *Masante* the narrator names the larger “Experiment” of which Meona is but a small piece. Here as elsewhere—in Masante, in the house further north in which he dreamt of Tynset, but also in hotel rooms of travels preceding Meona (173)—the goal is: “[n]iederschreiben um abzustreifen” (348). Instead of running from *Schrecken*, as he did in Masante, the narrator wants to make the *Schrecken* that haunts him present again in order to work through it. In Freudian terms, he wants to *erinnern, wiederholen, durcharbeiten*.¹¹⁵ Because Meona promises to be a place “wo nichts ist,” the narrator anticipates that “dort (...) es sich abspulen [wird],” without yet defining the *it* whose unfolding or unspooling he desires (232). He hopes to connect the images that emerge in the process, but in which constellation and to what end he is unsure himself: “Ich stelle fest: die Bilder kommen schnell und willig (...). Jetzt sollen sich Zusammenhänge ergeben und sich verknüpfen, so dass etwas entsteht, das ich brauchen kann. Aber was? Und wozu?” (247) Knowing that *Schrecken* “wirkt erst, wenn man ihn hinter sich hat” (161), the narrator deals with fragmented images that he yearns to form into a complete unit; in this vein, his self-imposed task in Meona is to think “[e]inen Gedanken, oder auch nur den Seitenzweig

¹¹⁵ Cf. Freud, “Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through.”

eines Gedankens, bis zur Reife (...) um ihn in ein Bild zu fassen, das in allem bis ins letzte stimmt" (167). Any thought or association could be "der rettende Gedanke" (187)—it could be the key to the riddle of *Schrecken* and might make sense of the fragments as which the narrator experiences his world in the aftermath of *Schrecken*. Therefore every memory, association, story, name—in sum: every "Ansatzpunkt" (233)—is worth investigation. And yet each point of departure also holds the danger of pulling the narrator back into *Schrecken*, without accomplishing the goal of making sense of it. Thus a paperweight, which the narrator brought from Masante and which sits on a stack of notes that serve him as *aide-mémoire*, is a warning sign from a transmission tower, reading "CHI TOCCA MUORE: Wer berührt, stirbt!" (271, cf. 163) The "Zettelkasten" contains a number of invisible notes—perhaps memories the narrator is incapable of writing down or even able to remember consciously—and these notes share one "Grundmotiv," namely *Schrecken* (220). The stack of notes exudes promise as well as threat. Perhaps the narrator would be able to make sense of his past if he consciously evoked individual memories and tried to relate them, but perhaps the traumatic, fragmented memories would be fatal.¹¹⁶

Meona is no man's land. It is an old caravansary with the ocean far to the east and a "Barbarenstaat" to the west (161).¹¹⁷ At the time of his arrival, only Maxine and Alain, a handful of scientists, and five members either of the police or the military, who guard against smugglers, are in Meona (164f.). Fascinated with names, the narrator says aloud "Me-o-na," marveling at the first syllable, which for bilingual Hildesheimer perhaps evoked the first person singular, followed by a long omega and a short "ne," which could inflect the construction as interrogatory. The name thus

¹¹⁶ In 1965 Hildesheimer wrote his editor that the title of the new prose project was *Toccata*, emphasizing the importance of memory's deadly lure for the entire project. Cf. Hildesheimer, letter to Dierk Rodewald and Klaus Ramm, December 25, 1965, Hildesheimer, *Briefe*, 141.

¹¹⁷ Hildesheimer identified it as a settlement in Israel. Hildesheimer and Prangel, "Interview mit Wolfgang Hildesheimer," 7.

brings together the I, the end, and a question mark, setting the tone for the narrator's search for story endings and perhaps his own death (165). Meona is a place in a process of gradual extinction (167), but this is not its most outstanding quality. What marks it as counterpoint to Masante and the narrator's earlier home in the mountains (the setting of *Tynset*, 204) is that, on a map, Meona dissolves in the white space that marks the vast desert. Because Meona is unmarked, for the narrator Meona is "eine weiße Fläche auf der Jagdkarte aller Verfolger und Häscher" (219).

Terror Travels in Sets of Two: Häscher

Häscher is the key word in *Masante*. It is an archaic term for persecutor, and it appears more than forty times in the text.¹¹⁸ *Häscher* are carriers of *Schrecken*, a word repeated with almost the same frequency. It is "erschreckend," for instance, how many parents choose to name their child Uwe, a name that the narrator, for whom names are red flags unleashing memories and associations, considers dangerous, for it appears to come "aus einem finsternen Ursprung" (169). Upon hearing the name Uwe, the narrator once experienced a "Schrecksekunde, die, wie so viele, durch Wiederholung wirkt. Die Sekunde vergeht, der Schreck bleibt" (170). The name Helmut, by contrast, provokes not fear but sadness: of the several Helmut's he knew, the one he liked committed suicide (157), perhaps because he was persecuted by *Häscher*. The small side remark, on the first page of the novel, that those people whom the narrator does not like do not commit suicide but act "im Gegenteil," i.e., commit homicide, or even genocide, vaguely establishes the narrator's position within a grid of victimization (157). While it is unclear whether he fell victim himself to the violence of *Häscher*, his victimization is suggested elsewhere (334).

¹¹⁸ Lea counts forty-one times; I noted the term *Häscher* forty-six times. Cf. Lea, *Hildesheimers Weg*, 92. In addition to *Häscher*, Hildesheimer uses the terms *Sbirren*, *Schergen*, and *agentes in rebus* synonymously (342).

Names such as Uwe and Helmut are “Anhaltspunkte” for the narrator (206). He furnishes his room at the inn with three personal items: a stack of note cards, the paperweight securing them, and a wall calendar. This is a Catholic calendar of saints and name days, and while each year the calendar is sent anonymously from Germany in a fruitless attempt to convert the narrator (157), the recipient treasures it for its wealth of names and the stories he associates with them. Names anchor the narrator’s life; “ohne sie wäre ich völlig verloren, mit ihnen bin ich es nur halb” (206). His is an obsessive interest in names: “mich hätte sogar interessiert, wie Rotkäppchen mit Vor- und Nachnamen hieß” (179). Interestingly his own name is of no importance to him (284), perhaps because he does not want *Häscher* to know it. But he collects other people’s calling cards, which he stores among his note cards or distributes as if they were his own to test whether he can “Fäden zwischen Unbekannten (...) spinnen, ein Gewebe von Ahnungen,” a game that sometimes ends with the discovery of dark secrets (235). The names and events marked by the church calendar *all* have violent secrets: reflecting on the day of the feast of precious blood, the narrator discovers the illegal practice of dealing in and forging relics (160); behind the celebration of the nine choirs of angels lies a history of *auto-de-fé* of those who disagreed on the exact number of choirs (170f.); the announcement of a world savings day spurred new waves of anti-Semitism (201); and Saint Simeon Stylites spread anti-Semitic propaganda and encouraged the burning of synagogues and the prosecution of innocents (319). The small calendar refers to a long history of inhuman criminal activity, including human trafficking (160) and murder (164); sexual violence against minors (170), women (191), and blood relatives (343); the Inquisition (275) and widespread witch-hunts (283, 286f.); and missionary services that brought austerity and violence (254). Not truth (“Wahrheit”) but church belief (“Glaubenswahrheit,” 171) is the primary concern of a system imposed by papal authority, guarded by

cardinals, and maintained by a well-organized network of *Häscher*. For the narrator, the word *Häscher* evokes an image from the bible, of men whose only aim and activity is to produce fear and terror (273).

The narrator's list of crimes committed in the name of Christianity and his connection of church history with the employment of persecutors suggests that *Masante*, above all, is the product of Hildesheimer's severe criticism of the church, especially the Catholic church (although he does not spare Protestantism either, cf. 256). Braese favors this interpretation of *Masante*.¹¹⁹ While Hildesheimer's critical engagement with Catholicism is evident, a result of his personal interest in the topic,¹²⁰ in my opinion it is incorrect to limit *Masante* to such a reading. While *Häscher* appear in the novel as foot soldiers of the church, hired by the pope as "Diener der absoluten Willkür und Gewalt des Kirchenstaates" (275), the emphasis in *Masante* lies on a different kind of *Häscher*, who, although well tolerated, are not actively engaged by the church (276). The *Häscher* who terrify the narrator are not those active in Middle Eastern harems (162) or in the Vatican police state (231); they are not the "Sbirren" of the Spanish Inquisition (275) or historical, long-forgotten "Fänger" or "Schergen" (273). Rather *Häscher* are Germans and Austrians of the narrator's own generation: they are former Nazis, members of Hitler's security police (203, 225), guilty of the genocide of the Salonika Jews (334). These *Häscher* were involved in the "final solution" (referred to by Hildesheimer as "endgültige Lösung," 274) as "Vergaser"

¹¹⁹ Braese combines his reading of church-related passages with those of instances in which the narrator objects to capitalism, connecting the two and arguing for an interpretation of *Masante* as a criticism of a link between Christianity and capitalism in postwar Germany. Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 368.

¹²⁰ For a period of time Hildesheimer was quite attracted to Catholicism, later explaining that artists in general are drawn to the ceremoniousness of Catholic practice. He considered writing a book on Catholicism but eventually dropped the project for practical reasons: he did not want to invest the time it would take to read up on church history. Cf. Hildesheimer and Hillrichs, *Ich werde nun schweigen*, 38. His intellectual and emotional engagement with Catholicism bore fruit in one prose piece, cf. Wolfgang Hildesheimer, "Exerzitien mit Papst Johannes," in *Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Gesammelte Werke. Bd. I, Erzählende Prosa*, ed. Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig and Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 313-30.

(291) and drove other victims into “Stacheldraht” (266). The *Schrecken* is thus clearly identified. The trauma that the narrator seeks to come to terms with is the Nazi genocide of the European Jews. With anti-Semitic propaganda spread by St. Simeon and Luther alike (319, 276), the church contributed to an environment that enabled genocide, but it is neither the main target of the narrator’s criticism nor the source of his fear.

The narrator, who may or may not have been a Jewish victim of Nazi persecution, has an impeccable memory for the names of *Häscher* he has met and their biographies. Flötterle shot his Greek girlfriend’s brother in Salonika (334) and is Fricke’s brother-in-law (203). Security police officer Fricke (225) acts only from a sense of duty (274) when he defiles a cemetery (202), presumably a Jewish cemetery. Tyrolian Kranzmeier brags of how he used to hit two sets of teeth with just one well-placed punch (221). Religious and musically inclined murderer Motschmann (213, 255f.)—or perhaps Mutschmann (328)—has a golden tooth on which his victims focused, knowing “dass jetzt alles vorbei ist” (213), and today he holds a desk job in which he fondly remembers the good feeling of intimidating his victim face-to-face (329). Perchtl wanted to become a priest until “der Zug der Zeit” called him to a different duty (256), which he executed with such vigor that he, like the transmission tower, should have carried a sign warning of his deadly powers (271). Starck, while drunk, strangled Dr. Szymunt Weiszbrod, a crime of which judge Kabasta—known from *Tynset* as the murderer of Bloch—acquitted him (220). Stollfuß is a friend of animals and nature, but not a people’s friend, and his former profession was to train dogs to kill “Leute (...) mit geschorenen Schädeln” (266f.), a method of killing he preferred over others, such as death by gas (291). Other *Häscher*—Völkl, Nekrepp, Globotschnik—join the group, but one of them, Schmitt-Lindau, is different: he was too gentle and was thus rejected for membership in the SA. As a philosopher with a

doctorate, he worked “an neuen ethischen Grundlagen,” sanctioning the system of *Häscher* he helped to refine (301). Most of the biographies are fictional, although those of Motschmann and Globotschink are based on the historical figures Martin Mutschmann and Odilo Globosnik, whom Hildesheimer knew for their extreme anti-Semitism.¹²¹

In stark contrast to the narrator’s extensive knowledge of the persecutors stands his ignorance of the victims. Despite his obsessive interest in names, he cannot remember the name of the person who suffered most immediately at the hands of *Häscher*: remembered at first only as a classmate—“wie hieß der?” (174)—who was fearful, “Gerber oder Felber oder Lünig” as the narrator alternately recalls the name (257), was actually “weit mehr als nur ein Mitschüler” (199). Late in the text the name Bloch, known as a murder victim in *Tynset*,¹²² “taucht aus irgendeiner Vergangenheit hervor, Bloch, sein Bild, sein Name, aber keine andere Eigenschaft als Furcht vor den Häschern” (272). Bloch is appended to the list of names but used interchangeably for the victim in general. The ambiguity created by the use of different names suggests that the narrator refers to many victims whose identities he would like to restore, though he fails because of their sheer quantity. The victim remains anonymous; she remains “kein bestimmter.” “Ich bin der, den Sie suchen,” the narrator once told (or imagines to have told) two *Häscher*. ““Wir suchen keinen bestimmten,”” they replied (320). The reader is left to piece together the story of the classmate, who fell victim to Fricke or Motschmann (212) when they asked to see his identification card. Reluctant to show it and thereby help *Häscher* in pursuit of their victims (257), he hid in train stations and visited many places, including Tynset, on his flight (258). Found in

¹²¹ Cf. Hildesheimer and Durzak, “Potentielles Ich,” 293. Durzak compared *Masante* to Alexander Kluge’s 1962 *Lebensläufe. Anwesenheitsliste für eine Beerdigung*, and Hildesheimer did not deny its influence.

¹²² Hildesheimer, *Tynset*, 63.

Germany, he was beaten (321); he was forced to pack “ein wenig Besitz” and then led to “an einen verschwiegenen Ort, so dass er niemals mehr gesehen würde, weder lebend noch tot” (299). Finally he is chased down a street and across a bridge,

es geht ein Winterwind, er bläst in Stößen, während man Bloch von hinten niederschießt, ihn in den Kanal wirft, wo sich sein Blut mit dem eisigen Abwasser mischt. Erst nach Tagen und Nächten zieht man ihn—er ist unkenntlich geworden—an einer anderen Brücke aus dem Wasser, während es schneit: Weihnachten steht vor der Tür, Leute tragen Weihnachtsbäume, zu Weihnachten—so munkelt man unter Nachbarn, aber Genaueres weiß niemand—, zu Weihnachten hat man wieder ein paar von den Kerlen abgeknallt. Das zur Zufriedenheit aller und zum Schutz der Bevölkerung, ja, es sind unruhige Zeiten, Krisenzeiten. (299)

This passage references the complicity of large parts of the German and Austrian population in the persecution of Jews; it also connects several loose associative chains, from Christmas trees and wind to the traumatic *Schrecken* of Bloch's end. *Häscher*, Bloch had told the narrator, always spread terror in sets of two (331); “[es sind] immer zwei, immer im Gleichschritt,” the narrator learns in Salonika (255) where he met *Häscher* personally (331). As result, the narrator is suspicious of pairs of men: “Wo zwei kommen, ist Vorsicht geboten, Angst ist am Platz” (228). Upon entering the bar for the first time, the narrator is relieved to see only one and “nicht zwei Tropenhelme, kein Grund zur Unruhe!” (167) At the bar, Maxine tells the narrator of a Christmas tree, left to her by two men (298), and suddenly the narrator panics and immediately considers leaving Meona, which no longer seems like a white space on the map:

Dieser Weihnachtsbaum in der Wüste! Es werden wieder weiße Flächen sichtbar auf der Landkarte der Schrecken. Vielleicht ist das ein Zeichen, dass der Ausweg durch den Sand, für den Fall, dass irgendeiner ihn zu gehen beliebe, Gerber zum Beispiel oder Lünig, versperrt sei. (...) [I]ch [will] nicht dort sein, wo es Häscher antreibt, einen Motschmann, einen Schmitt-Lindach. Hätte denn Maxine von denen einen Weihnachtsbaum angenommen? Ich werde nicht lange hierbleiben, es hält mich nicht an einem Ort, wo eine unbekannte Hand

Kulturgegenstände verteilt, böse Kerne ins Idyllische verpacht; einen Punkt, der einbezogen ist in das Netz der Planer und Vermesser, die ihre Grenzen dauernd auswärts treiben, Unwirtliches wirtlich, Unheimliches heimisch zu machen, Bäume pflanzen oder schmücken und so den Boden vorbereiten für das Entsetzliche: Weihnachtsbaum—Singen unter dem Baum—Hausmusik—Hausordnung—Zuchtundordnung—Verhör und Folterung—Mord—Motschmann, Globotschnik, Perchtl— — (253)

The existence of a Christmas tree in the desert unsettles the narrator. The tradition of the tree originated in Germany, was popularized by Luther—identified as an anti-Semite and a proponent of *Häscher* (256)—and spread all over the Western world in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. With the association of Bloch's death, the complicit population carrying trees, and Maxine's Christmas tree, the narrator fears that the tree foreshadows the arrival of Nazi *Häscher* in the desert. In one of only a very few direct references to Germany and Germanness,¹²³ the narrator articulates his concern for German ambitions to territorial expansion: "Nichts gegen das Deutsche in seinen Grenzen, doch viel gegen den Anspruch, der es aus den Grenzen löst" (188).

The winter wind, and wind in general, evokes fear in the narrator, who associates it with Bloch's death. The afternoon winds commence "die böse Stunde" when he is haunted by memories that force him "auf alle viere," and fear is the emotional correspondent to wind (204f.). Thus the wellbeing of the narrator depends on "woher der Wind weht" (205), obviously referring not only to physical wind but political trends as well.¹²⁴ "[D]amals," when Starck killed Weiszbrod, the laws dictated by political winds of the time protected a murderer (220). Although political winds shifted in the meantime, the narrator senses a growing desire for the return of legal safeguarding of murder, and because political winds go with the majority, he fears the near resurrection of the old system. Already Kabasta and Kranzmeier are on

¹²³ Infrequently he refers to city names, such as Nuremberg (175, 345) and Frankfurt (303)—incidentally the sites of the two largest sets of Nazi trials.

¹²⁴ Cf. Hildesheimer's reasons for leaving Germany.

their way into political office (220). The return of *Häscher* seems to the narrator imminent, since even in the current democracy former Nazis were not being prosecuted. Despite their murderous past, today they live “gut und gern” (266) in office jobs (272) and will die, unlike their victims, peacefully (266). In an image that overwhelms him, the narrator connects *Häscher* of *Einsatzgruppen* whom no one wishes to remember, the nameless victims who are forgotten (even honorably so), and the general satisfaction with this situation of amnesia and welcomed oblivion:

[D]a erschienen Zeichen vergangener Schrecken, leuchteten Spuren vom Blut der Geiseln, erschossen von abziehenden Schreckensmännern, Umlegern, und da sind sie denn wieder, die Häscher [sic]

Motschmann, Kranzmeier, Fötterle, jünger als heute, vielleicht auch eine andere Generation, doch unverändert, gestieft und gespornt, *im Einsatz*, wie man es nannte, nennt und nennen wird. Ein Bild zwar, aber keine Geschichte mehr. Das Blut ist verblichen, die Opfer liegen, in Ehren vergessen, unter der Erde, die Angehörigen haben sich längst abgefunden, und Kranzmeier, Fricke und Kabasta weisen, gebläht in tiefer Befriedigung, auf Untaten, die seitdem begangen wurden und begangen werden, und lassen sich darüber vergessen. Aber ich, ich habe das Bild unter meinen Bildern. (216f., emphasis mine)

Holding on to the images of Nazi persecutors, the narrator criticizes German and Austrian forms of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* that discarded them. Unlike the former perpetrators he cannot compare their crimes with those of others. Nazis and *Häscher* are different from “Fänger” (273) and “Sbirren” (275), in so far as the former were “ausgerüstet mit der Zustimmung der Behörden, bedacht mit dem Behagen einer wachsenden Mehrheit, die sich nicht zu fürchten braucht, die den Schrecken gern billigt, weil er sie nicht trifft” (273). The narrator’s fear of *Häscher* and the status quo that may allow—that will *probably* allow—their return, is omnipresent, which is why he envies animals: not only do they forget yesterday’s “tödlichen Kampf,” but they also do not know any fear of tomorrow’s *Häscher* (184).

The narrator believes he has found protection against the winds in Meona, which are mysterious and frightening even to Maxine and Alain (312), when he sees the Irishman use an umbrella (227). Pondering the usefulness of umbrellas in the desert, the narrator recalls the history of the umbrella—and belatedly answers his question from *Tynset* as to who had invented it.¹²⁵ While the story of the umbrella is fictional, Hildesheimer's narrator remembers learning from schoolbooks that it was a poor tailor, “[gezeichnet] von der Würde des Scheiternden,” who designed the umbrella, much to the amusement of his neighborhood. The narrator then radicalizes the image by turning the tailor into a “Jud!” of whom everyone hoped, “dass die Vernichtung ihn treffe” (268). The narrator is suddenly confronted with the recollection that a few decades ago umbrellas were produced in Germany “aus Menschenhaut, was übrigens (...) nicht in den Schulbüchern steht” (269). The associative chain of umbrella, the extermination of the Jews, and human skin is later concentrated in another of the narrator's memories, this one of Bloch, to whom one of the *Häscher* said: “‘ich möchte nicht in deiner Haut stecken, und, in der Tat, ich fürchte, du wirst auch bald nicht mehr drin stecken, Bloch’” (300). In *Tynset* Bloch's murderer was identified as Kabasta, who today “steht (...) als Veteran auf der Landesliste” (220). In *Masante* the narrator's knowledge of the history of the umbrella's invention, known from school, thus led to cognizance of the continued existence of *Häscher* who remain unpunished in postwar Germany. This fact no textbook reveals.

Gottlieb Hinkel, the Jewish tailor and inventor of the umbrella according to the text, is not unlike Don Quixote, “diesem größten Scheiterer, dem man zu ewiger

¹²⁵ Cf. Hildesheimer, *Tynset*, 266. In *Masante* Hildesheimer picks up several motifs he introduced in *Tynset* or earlier, most importantly Hamlet, whom the narrator sends into the desert as form of dismissal because his father's death is, compared to other deaths, benign (263, 277-280); and Salonika, the Greek city that lost its Jewish population almost entirely to the persecution by *Häscher* (189, 196, 255, 300-333).

Erinnerung Denkmäler setzen sollte” (189, cf. 268). Instead of commemorating him as a victim of ridicule and anti-Semitism, Hinkel is instead remembered as a fraud by the same textbooks that omit Nazi crimes. Hinkel, who became famous once he sold an umbrella to margrave Friedrich Wilhelm von Ansbach (another fictional character), is discovered to have posed as member of the nobility (269f.). Any violence he might have experienced was caused by his own doing, the textbook interpretation seems to suggest.

The figure of von Ansbach appears twice in *Masante*. Previously, a list of animals—and one human—hunted by von Ansbach, was inserted into the text uncontextualized and without commentary by the narrator:

1763 Milane,
4174 Reiher,
1647 Elstern,
10084 Rebhühner,
985 Fasane,
939 Hasen,
1 Halbbruder, über den jedoch die Geschichte der Jagd schweigt. (236f.)

This list, extended by one chimney sweep the margrave shot to impress his girlfriend, records the exact number of victims, and it is reminiscent of lists compiled by *Einsatzgruppen*, the SS death squads.¹²⁶ Besides the earlier mention of *Häscher* who are “im Einsatz” (216), this is the only instance in which Hildesheimer’s experiences at the *Einsatzgruppen* trial in Nuremberg find direct expression in his work.

Although the *Häscher* under consideration are Nazis and *Schrecken* refers to the Holocaust, as subtle but frequent side remarks such as “Zyklon” (165) or “Laderampe” (216) confirm, this specific event is not a singularity within history. Following the curious insertion of the list of hunted animals, the narrator recapitulates

¹²⁶ Cf. Lea, *Hildesheimers Weg*, 278.

the family history of his German girlfriend Niki Almesin, who is the only “wohlgeratene Tochter” in her family, and he concludes:

[E]s entsteht eine saubere Reihe von Kämpfern, Raufbolden, Säufern und Mördern, die dafür sorgt, dass Geschichte entsteht. Vergeblich sucht man irgendwo den Atemzug eines humanen Gedankens oder auch nur einen Ausspruch, der Menschenwürde zu erkennen gäbe, oder einen, der sie zumindest in anderen erkannt hätte, aber nichts: keiner hat etwas zum Guten getan oder gesagt, keiner ist auf dem Scheiterhaufen geendet oder hat einen vom Scheiterhaufen gerettet. (237f.)

In the view of the narrator history is the culmination of crimes against humanity. No one stands in for the victims to save them from murderous history; no one judges the perpetrators and restores the dignity of those victimized. When Niki’s family bears mentally ill children, her German relatives “schieben den Verfall auf fremdländischen Einschlag,” whereas it was incestuous relationships that caused genetic defects and altered the family, as the narrator knows (238). The family, instead of taking responsibility, looked for and found a scapegoat to blame, and this, according to the narrator, is how history repeats itself. Identical with history is time in general, that is, the passing of time that enables the unfolding of history. Therefore the narrator is “erschrocken” when he discovers among his notes a card that reads “ZEIT” (215). Time is another “four-letter-word,” like “FUCK” and “SHIT,” and it is the curse of time from which the narrator believes he suffers (215).

According to *Masante* the Holocaust may not have been the deadliest catastrophe, but it is the one that keeps the narrator in perpetual fear. Hildesheimer, who in later years shows great engagement in ecological initiatives and becomes an outspoken supporter of environmental groups such as Greenpeace, already makes known in *Masante* his concern that man is in the process of destroying life

altogether.¹²⁷ Braese argues that the ecological subtext of *Masante* serves the purpose of articulating the extent to which Hildesheimer experienced the dimension of Auschwitz, which is similar to unavoidable environmental catastrophe in that both are fatal.¹²⁸ Several environmental concerns—referenced as the exhaustion of natural resources and extinct insects (167), overfished bodies of water (217), deforestation (262), artificial overfeeding of animals raised for food (282), and industrial food (282)—mark this subtext of *Masante*, which is intimately connected to yet another history of abuse, violence, and misanthropy: capitalism.¹²⁹ Hildesheimer links capitalism to the centuries-old practice of oppressing the poor (171) to sustain order between “Hütten” and “Palästen” (317).¹³⁰ *Häscher* were first employed in the defense of that order, and in this role they matured to become the twentieth-century *Häscher* of the sort of Motschmann, Fricke, et al. In establishing this link Hildesheimer suggests a connection between capitalism and the Holocaust, and, more recently, environmental disasters: all three share as their cause human activity in disregard for life. It is via this connection that *Masante*, beyond addressing inadequate attempts at *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, anti-Semitism, and the affective instability of victims of

¹²⁷ Hildesheimer’s later writings attest to his commitment to environmental causes. Cf. his public statements in the 1980s, published originally in his local newspapers: “Klage und Anklage” (1984), “Notat eines Verlierers” (1986), and “In den Wind geschrieben” (1988), published in vol. VII of *Gesammelte Werke*. By the late eighties, after successfully protesting against various environmentally questionable projects in Grisons (such as a power plant at the Graina mountain pass), Hildesheimer was known as one who “öffentlich auftritt gegen alles, was die Umwelt gewissenlos ausbeutet.” N. N., “Zorniges Beten. Wolfgang Hildesheimers *Klage und Anklage*,” *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, August 11, 1989. In a *Stern* interview in 1984 that received considerable attention, Hildesheimer said: “Ich glaube, dass in wenigen Generationen der Mensch die Erde verlassen wird. (...) Die Katastrophen unserer Tage sind irreversibel.” Qtd. in: Briegleb, “Weiterschreiben!,” 351.

¹²⁸ Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 372.

¹²⁹ The connection is further explored in a radio play that aired in 1974, and which Hildesheimer considered part of the *Masante* material, cf. Wolfgang Hildesheimer, “Hauskauf,” in *Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Gesammelte Werke in sieben Bänden. Bd. V, Hörspiele*, ed. Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig and Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 401–44. For a discussion of *Hauskauf*, cf. Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 371n15.

¹³⁰ “Friede den Hütten! Krieg den Palästen!” was Büchner’s revolutionary call in the 1834 pamphlet *Der Hessische Landbote*. Hildesheimer’s admiration for Büchner’s political writings is manifest in his Büchner prize speech.

the past who can no longer negotiate the present, articulates a political agenda that is anti-capitalist and environmentalist. In the seventies, this should have resonated well with the left—but it did not, as the reception of *Masante* missed it more or less completely.

Disappearance into the Desert

Towards the end of *Masante*, the narrator is increasingly attracted by the lure of the desert. Though in the beginning he experiences panic and fear at the sight of the desert (204) and seeks shelter in the bar (206), he later contemplates a walk through the desert as a possibility to see “Vergangenes im Licht einer neuen Sicht” (291). Because he has “die Eigenschaft der Sicht noch nicht im Griff” (291), he discards the idea quickly, but returns to it later in the full knowledge that he may die in the desert (347). His gradual leaning towards visiting the desert despite its danger goes hand in hand with the slow realization that he is failing to bear witness to the past in a manner that would allow him to work through it. The realization that “alle Ansätze (...) vertan [sind]” (166) drives him into the desert, presumably to commit suicide or at least to refuse resistance against dying. There is no *Ansatz*, no point for departure, for the future, as the present is an ongoing echo of the past. His “Ansatz ist verwirkt” (181). Furthermore, there is no use for testimony, for no one is there to listen. The following is one of the crucial passages of the text that accentuates the narrator’s resignation over history, his failure to change its course, and the fruitlessness of testimony:

Was rede ich da vor mir her, was schwingt da mit, was verschweige ich? Was sollen die herausgegriffenen Beispiele, was versuche ich anhand ihrer zu retten? Eine Niederschrift anfertigen, die Nachkommen an mich erinnert? Ich habe keine. Und wozu erinnert bleiben?

Wohl dem Anaximander! Er hat nur einen einzigen Satz gesagt, der steht. Gewiss, er hatte das Glück, ihn aus einer weithin unerkannten Welt greifen zu können. Die meine ist erkannt und ausgebeutet. Sie gibt keinen guten Satz mehr her. Den Punkt setzen, den Schlusstrich

setzen, meine Zeit ist vorbei. In Zukunft wird nicht mehr gesungen: es gibt keine Tonarten mehr zur Wahl. Nur noch eine. Nein, zwei: Befehl und Schrei. Wer nicht befiehlt oder schreit, der verstummt. Zeugenschaft abgeben? Für wen? Wovon? Von Gleichgültigkeit, Dulden, Versagen, Ohnmacht? Lieber ein Ende; der Pfahl im Fleisch ist besser als die muntere Salmonelle, nur eben, er schmerzt. Ich war „zu nichts bestimmt,“ zum Kämpfer schon gar nicht. Gern wäre ich einer von denen gewesen, die fahneschwingend über Barrikaden springen, ein Befreier unter Befreiern. Aber wer sind sie? Ein Mythos, ein schönes Märchen. (...) Die falschen Ordnungen sind eingesessen, eingesengt; wer sagt, dass sie ausrottbar seien, der irrt. Der kennt sie nicht, die Häscher, die Sbirren, Schergen, agentes in rebus und ihre Herren.

„...denn sie müssen Buße zahlen und für ihre Ungerechtigkeiten gerichtet werden, gemäß der Ordnung der Zeit.“ Wohl dem Anaximander! Und wohl der Ordnung seiner Zeit. (341f.)¹³¹

Here the narrator questions his method. He picks examples of *Schrecken* as his classmate suffered them, neither addressing, let alone examining, his own experiences, nor explaining the circumstance in which he found “ein menschliches Ohr” (261), something he mentions casually (“übrigens”) but quickly dismisses (“aber das ist eine andere Geschichte,” 245). To give testimony in writing is pointless. There is no interest in his perspective of history, which is that of the victim who experienced not heroism but helplessness and the callousness of complicit bystanders. He is no “Held (...) der Tat” (206), he did not fight back (315), and because there is no audience for his testimony—not even Maxine—, which essentially would amount to justified accusations and require moral repair, he decides to go silent. He is aware that in his inner world “sich seit geraumer Zeit bereits eine Todesursache [bildet]” (346), and this *Todesursache* is the “neue Dimension[, die] in mein Bewusstsein getreten [ist], eine gefährliche Wachheit” (291). The narrator reaches the “Bewusstsein, in dem die

¹³¹ By using the terms *Häscher*, *Sbirren*, *Scherger*, and *agentes in rebus*, the narrator refers to history as a succession of criminals operating in the name of the state or the church. *Agentes in rebus* were Roman imperial agents in the early middle ages; the Italian *Sbirri* served as papal police; *Scherger*, misleadingly translated into English as henchman, originally described court officers, including hangmen and torturers in the service of the court.

Dimension Auschwitz erhalten ist”¹³² und therefore recognizes that the world is divided into orders (“Befehle” by *Häscher*, the church, the police and military, capitalists, and politicians) and cries (“Schreie”). He is unwilling to participate, and thus his only alternative is silence. Every protest has been voiced, every rebellion attempted; there is nothing new for the narrator to try to change the course of history. Anaximander’s dictum read that those who commit crimes be punished according to the law of the time. However, the laws of the narrator’s time no longer punish the crimes committed against him in the past. He is alone with the repercussions of these crimes. He takes his loneliness to the last extreme, making it absolute by seeking death, not through salmonella-poisoned products of the industrialized world, but by the poles that mark the desert on the *Häscher*’s map and disclose his location (219). The mention of pole is significant: throughout the text the narrator referenced poles (189, 212, 219, 244ff., 322) as markers for both guidance and deception, and the frequent use of “Pfahl” and his ultimate death near the desert poles (364f.) suggests that he unconsciously considered suicide all along.

Resignation over his failure to give testimony—that is, the incapability to do so satisfactorily coupled with the lack of an audience—drives him into the desert. The typewriter that greets him upon arrival at the bar is simultaneously “Herausforderung” and “Abschreckung”; the narrator wants to write an elegy, a melancholic poem to lament death (177), but eventually he writes one line—“shall be back presently”—before in fact disappearing into the desert (362). The failure to write his testimonial is intimately linked to the inability to remember and make sense of past events. He often reached “eine Ebene innerer Mitteilbarkeit,” in which “Teile des Gehirns (...) miteinander [kommunizieren], (...) Gedanken unter sich selbst [austauschen]” without, however, sharing with the narrator their “Resultat”:

¹³² Hildesheimer, “Frankfurter Poetik-Vorlesungen,” 57.

Dann war mir, als erschließe sich jener Zusammenhang, den ich hier suche, und erst in diesem Zusammenhang zwischen allem Ausdrückbaren, würde sich die Sache, Stoff und Form vereint, zu ihrem Hervortreten entschließen. Ich wartete auf den Augenblick der Überraschung. Doch der Augenblick kam nicht. Die Erkenntnisse dort oben in meinem Gehirn wurden mir nur vorgegaukelt, die schreibfähige Hand legte sich aufs Papier, die Worte bildeten sich nicht, die Erleuchtung blieb aus.

So saß ich vor dem leeren Blatt: nichts. (...) [E]ine Erkenntnis innen, die sich mir selbst nicht zu erkennen gab (...). Nicht verwertbar. (...) So verharrte ich in vergeblicher Hingabe an etwas vor langem Erlebtes, und doch nur in vager Erinnerung daran, und schließlich eroberte die Verstörung das Feld, der Moment erlosch: nichts mehr greifbar, der Augenblick für immer verloren—nevermore— (260)

Erlebnis does not translate into *Erfahrung* for the narrator; he cannot make sense of it, although he knows that all the information is there, yet locked in his unconsciousness. If “die Stunden des Erlebens” were to coincide with “Erkenntnis,” that is, if he had not experienced traumatic events, “so wäre ich ein anderer” (336). As it is, he is haunted by lost memory fragments that he can find “nie mehr, und das Nichtgefundene wächst im Nimbus, steigert sich zur verloren Lösung aller Rätsel, dabei wäre es nichts gewesen als ein Zeugnis von Scheitern und Versagen” (187). Coupled with his traumatic memory is the feeling of survivor guilt; he is convinced that the full knowledge of his traumatic past would disclose that he failed to intervene and prevent it from happening. Guilt is thematized in *Masante* as strongly as in *Tynset*, albeit more subtly. From the onset the narrator feels the burden of his “Schuld an meinem Versagen” that results from failure to have acted heroically (158). But because he was “harmlos und für andere nicht schwierig,” he became an “ewig bestürzter Unheld” (179); his continuous consternation is the consequence of his inactivity. Maxine articulates the narrator’s self-accusation when she holds his gaze and says:

„Sie haben verzichtet. Sie sind immer ausgewichen und haben anderen Ihren Platz überlassen. Das hat seine zwei Seiten. Manchmal erhalten

die anderen den Lohn, manchmal aber auch den Schlag, der Ihnen gilt. Ich kenne solche—ich kannte einen, ich habe vergessen wie er hieß, den wollte man erschießen, aber der Schuss hat einen anderen getroffen, der hinter ihm ging, und er hat sich nicht umgedreht, sonst hätte der nächste Schuss ihn getroffen.“ (315)

Rather than respond to Maxine, the narrator flees the bar. He stops at the bar five times altogether, and each time she is awake, he engages in narrative competitions with Maxine. On this final visit the narrator runs away, owing Maxine a response. Maxine has the last word in their fragmented but prolonged dialogue that takes its specific form from the peculiar workings of memory. Maxine, herself unsure of her own past, tries to correct for this by absorbing the life stories of others and making them her own (306). She is a sponge full of memories, eager to share the curious ones and drowning in alcohol those she cannot bear (a habit the narrator formerly shared, cf. 260). The narrator challenges her to tell the sad tales, but in the end she proffers the final challenge. If she is correct in her characterization of the narrator, he feels responsible for and guilty of Bloch's death. His guilt, be it real or perceived, is amplified by the process of aging: the older he gets, the more the gulf between him and the dead widens. His guilt lies in not having died earlier, along with the others (345f.). The narrator goes into the desert, symbolically reenacting the role of the biblical scapegoat in Leviticus, a role assigned to his Jewish community, expunged in the Holocaust. Through his act of self-abnegation, the narrator seeks to assuage his guilt and reunite with those other scapegoats, restoring connection with his lost community. The symbolism of the scapegoat and the desert has more to do with the plight of the lost Jews than with the plight of the forlorn narrator.

There is one other component that motivates the narrator to seek the desert. In addition to survivor guilt and to being unable to experience (*erfahren*) the past, and thus failing to give testimony adequately, fear drives the narrator. The Irish soldier or

policeman, who is stationed in Meona to control smuggling, warns the narrator upon their first encounter that he would end “auf allen vieren” if he were to continue running (166). The narrator is alarmed by the Irishman’s knowledge of his movements and also by the expression “on all fours,” which is a phrase that recurs later in the text and refers alternatively to the narrator’s mental state (204), to an episode at Niki’s home that points to a dark secret (241), and to the abuse Maxine suffered as child (252). Most disconcerting is the possibility that the Irishman may want to see the narrator’s identification card (166). From the practice of *Häscher* the narrator knows that checking identification is a pretext for violence (256, 329). Asked for his “Ausweis,” the victim knows, “dass jetzt alles vorbei ist” (213). Once the Irishman asks the narrator for his identification (353), the narrator’s plan to go into the desert takes concrete form, all the while the narrator reminds himself to show his passport to the Irishman later in the day: “Nicht vergessen: heute abend den Ausweis! Er [=der Ire] soll nicht noch einmal fragen müssen” (361, cf. 365). The reminder is useless: the narrator does not return from the desert. Once he steps outside *La dernière chance*, he is being lulled in by the wind (364) and moves from pole to pole until he no longer sees Meona (365). The next pole lures him with the message “TOCCARE”; it does not, however, reveal that those who touch will die (“CHI TOCCA MUORE,” 364). At the sight of Meona lost, as he stands by the pole to which he previously sent Hamlet (277), the narrator shakes “wie Espenlaub” (365) and hopes to be carried by the wind “über meine böse Stunde hinweg und weiter” (366). Thus the narrator is lost. Whether or not he dies remains unclear, although the ending suggests that he does.

As Hildesheimer explains, he wanted to get rid of his narrator: “ich lasse es offen, aber es ist wahrscheinlich, dass [der Erzähler] in der Wüste umgekommen ist. Für mich jedenfalls ist er weg, ich bin meinen Ich-Erzähler los.”¹³³ Similar statements

¹³³ Hildesheimer and Prangel, “Interview mit Wolfgang Hildesheimer,” 6.

appear in all major interviews regarding *Masante*.¹³⁴ Already in 1968, Hildesheimer told interviewer and friend Walter Jens about *Masante*—then still with the working title *Meona*—that he would send his narrator into the desert, adding that with the loss of a narrator with whom he much identified, he would stop writing prose altogether:

[D]er Ich-Erzähler ist am Ende nicht mehr da. *Tynset* hat da noch einen zweiten Teil zugelassen (...). Hier also ist kein zweiter Teil mehr möglich. Wenn du dich sehr stark mit deinem Ich-Erzähler identifizierst, dann hast du ihn natürlich verloren in dem Moment, in dem der Ich-Erzähler nicht mehr da ist. (...) Du musst bedenken, ich komme jetzt zum Ende, nicht wahr. Der Ich-Erzähler, mein Ich-Erzähler, die exemplarische Figur, ist nach *Meona* nicht mehr existent. Ich werde also für ein größeres Prosawerk jetzt keine Figur haben.¹³⁵

Indeed, *Masante* was Hildesheimer's final prose work: "Nach 'Masante' ist kein erzählendes Werk bei mir mehr möglich."¹³⁶ Together with his narrator Hildesheimer adopted silence in consequence of the impossibility of giving testimony in an atmosphere of "Gleichgültigkeit, Dulden, Versagen, Ohnmacht" (341).

The End of Fiction

With *Masante*, Hildesheimer declared that he had reached the end of his fiction, and "The End of Fiction" is the title of a lecture he gave in 1975 at Dublin and Trinity Universities in Dublin and at several other locations in Ireland. Hildesheimer translated the text into German, and it appeared the following year in *Merkur*.¹³⁷ In

¹³⁴ Cf. "Am Ende von 'Tynset' hatte ich diesen Ich-Erzähler noch. Am Ende von 'Masante' ist er wahrscheinlich in der Wüste verloren gegangen. Jetzt habe ich niemand mehr," Hildesheimer and Durzak, "Potentielles Ich," 286. Elsewhere he points to "'Masante,' worin der Ich-Erzähler buchstäblich in die Wüste geschickt wird. So bin ich meines Erzählers verlustig, ich kann ihn nicht aus der Wüste zurückholen," Hildesheimer and Kesting, "Ende der Fiktionen," 54.

¹³⁵ Hildesheimer and Walter, "(Interview)," 91, 94.

¹³⁶ Hildesheimer and Durzak, "Potentielles Ich," 276.

¹³⁷ Hildesheimer, "End of Fiction"; Wolfgang Hildesheimer, "Das Ende der Fiktionen," in *Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Gesammelte Werke in sieben Bänden. Bd. VII Vermischte Schriften*, ed. Christiaan Lucas Hart Nibbrig and Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), 141-58. The speech resulted in considerable interest in Hildesheimer, especially after its reprint in 1984, which caused a literary debate on the use of literature, H. D. Sacker, "Hildesheimer's Vision of Literature," *Hermathena* CXXI (1976),

essence, “The End of Fiction” marks a radicalization but also a refutation of Hildesheimer’s standpoint vis-à-vis literature after Auschwitz as expressed in the Frankfurt lectures.

The rearticulation of Hildesheimer’s poetics was necessitated by the reception of *Masante*, which paralleled that of *Tynset* in its misappropriation of the novel. Braese discusses at great length one particular review by Joachim Kaiser, commenting on the dubious reaction from Kaiser, who had been a student of Adorno but nonetheless misread Hildesheimer’s narrator as a globetrotter (as opposed to a displaced person or emigrant) with “Hass auf Teutonisches.”¹³⁸ Kaiser fails to grasp both *Schrecken* and *Häscher* as references to the Nazi past and insufficient attempts at working through this past. His criticism is that *Masante* lacks content: “Und wo? Und wann? Und wer? Um was geht es in, ja was heißt überhaupt ‘Masante’? Handfeste Informationen bitte: woran sind denn die Erinnerungen (...) und Ängste befestigt?”¹³⁹ Some of Kaiser’s other comments, in which he condemns what he believes to be the narrator’s elitist attitude in foregrounding victims over perpetrators (!), the narrator’s mocking of German soldiers, and his lack of motivation to analyze the source of his fears, prove that Kaiser read *Masante* without self-reflection and without consideration of Hildesheimer’s subjective experiences informing the text. Other reviewers remark upon the political aspects of *Masante* and confirm that the novel practices “Gesellschaftskritik,” but they lament the abstract construction that makes it difficult

198-213; Hans Dieter Zimmermann, “Das Ende der Literatur und das Ende der Welt. Zu Wolfgang Hildesheimers Absage an die Literatur,” in *Poetik*, ed. Hans Dieter Schlosser and Hans Dieter Zimmermann (Frankfurt/M.: Athenäum, 1988), 67-78; Briegleb, “Weiterschreiben!”; Stephan Braese, “...as some of us have experienced it.’ Wolfgang Hildesheimers ‘The End of Fiction’,” in *Deutsche Nachkriegsliteratur und der Holocaust*, ed. Stephan Braese et al. (Frankfurt/M., New York: Campus, 1998), 331-49; Martin Lüdke, “Der Rest ist Schweigen. Wolfgang Hildesheimer und ‘Das Ende der Fiktionen’,” in *Literarisches Krisenbewußtsein. Ein Perzeptions- und Produktionsmuster im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Keith Bullivant and Bernhard Spies (Munich: Iudicium, 2001), 182-83.

¹³⁸ Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 388-94, Kaiser qtd. in: *ibid.*, 93.

¹³⁹ Kaiser qtd. in: *ibid.*, 391.

for the reader to engage with it fully.¹⁴⁰ Peter Horst Neumann, author of the scathing review of *Tynset* discussed previously, writes positively about *Masante*, calling it “das Meisterwerk eines großen Schriftstellers (...) und eines der wichtigsten Bücher seit langem.”¹⁴¹ Because he was involved in the editing process of *Masante*, however, he warns his readers that his opinion is perhaps “voreingenommen.”¹⁴² His glowing review is phrased cautiously and presents a contradiction in itself; thus it is quite typical of the mixed reception of *Masante*.¹⁴³

In the atmosphere of the *Literaturbetrieb* in the late sixties and seventies—with an emphasis on realism and an outspoken, direct political agenda of literature—*Masante* was an outlier. Hildesheimer was greatly indebted to literary modernism, and *Masante* is written in respect for that tradition. *Masante* anticipates Hildesheimer’s “The End of Fiction,” the author’s second theoretical consideration of literature, in which he vehemently defends European modernism against the German *Literaturbetrieb*. Here he sides with British writer and critic Cyril Connolly, who in the early 1940s had debated the use of literature in the context of catastrophe, and against the programmatic declaration of the first General Congress of Soviet writers in Moscow in 1934 that all literature acted in the service of antifascism. Connolly wrote in his diary, published in 1944 as *The Unquiet Grave. A Word Cycle*, that the “true function of a writer is to produce a masterpiece.”¹⁴⁴ In his speech, Hildesheimer hopes to answer the question whether “it really [is] the task of the writer *today* to write a masterpiece,” but he prefaces his response by referring to a time in which writing

¹⁴⁰ Geno Hartlaub, “Endstation Meona,” in *Wolfgang Hildesheimer*, ed. Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1989), 261-63, here 262.

¹⁴¹ Peter Horst Neumann, “Voreingenommene Bemerkungen,” in *Wolfgang Hildesheimer*, ed. Volker Jehle (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1989), 264-68, here 268.

¹⁴² Cf. the title of the review, “Voreingenommene Bemerkungen.”

¹⁴³ On the reception of *Masante*, cf. Stanley, *Critics*, 31-43.

¹⁴⁴ Cyril Connolly, *The Unquiet Grave. A Word Cycle* (London: The Curwen Press for Horizon, 1944). Qtd. in: Hildesheimer, “End of Fiction,” 125.

meant “to escape from the hardships of everyday life and treat [oneself] to writing page after page of self-observation and memory; (...) in short: to creative exploitation of his [=the writer’s] pleasures and—more often—his depressions.”¹⁴⁵ This art of writing—always performed in the first person singular and thus, for the most part, excluding “novels, plays or biographies”—brought forward a subjectivity that, in Connolly’s words, shows ““lack of belief in the idea of progress [and an] interest in, mingled with contempt for[,] humanity.””¹⁴⁶ Hildesheimer declares his pronounced sympathy for an emphasis on subjectivity by stating that “I for one (...) have never been able to write about anything but my potential self.”¹⁴⁷ Having thus allied himself with Connolly and, by extension, literary modernism, Hildesheimer points to his opponent: German writers of a certain bent. Answering the question of literature’s function today (in 1975), he says:

[I]s it really the task of the writer *today* to write a masterpiece? And while I, an older writer, would say: yes it is, it always has been and will be until the end of literature, you would find a majority of young writers—at least in Germany—who would sneer at you at the very mention of the word “masterpiece.” The task of the writer, they would say, is to contribute towards the changing of society. The more moderate ones see this task in sharpening consciousness and receptive faculties of the reading public in preparation of this change; the extremist ones would say: a writer who does not put his writing into the immediate service of world revolution is no writer but a parasite.¹⁴⁸

Considering the Frankfurt lectures in which Hildesheimer formulated the task of literature as widening the consciousness of the reader to include the dimension of Auschwitz, it may be reasonable to suggest that Hildesheimer self-identified as a moderately political writer in opposition of an extremist one. However, having drawn the line between European modernist and contemporary German political writers, he

¹⁴⁵ Hildesheimer, “End of Fiction,” 128, 25.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 126.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 127.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 128f.

counts himself among the former and disregards the notion of political novelists altogether. This is evidenced by his negative reference to the 1934 writers' congress in Moscow. There individualism "was turned into a term of abuse," and the tradition of Proust and Joyce dismissed in favor of a realist literature that aimed to withstand anti-fascism. As Hildesheimer knows from his own experience—one of his very rare autobiographical remarks, and one he omitted in the German translation!—literature did not make an impact on the political climate of the 1930s at all.¹⁴⁹ While earlier Hildesheimer demanded that writers widen their audience's consciousness and thus change readers' awareness in such ways as to provoke socio-political action, in "The End of Fiction" he concludes that it is an illusion that writers and literature can change society. Although he clearly expresses the imperative that society *must* change, in his lecture he insists it will not happen at literature's prompting. German writers who in 1975 believe in their participation in the revolution should learn from history that literature is politically ineffective: "the intellectual is *not* taken seriously by the political, neither as an adversary nor as a support."¹⁵⁰ With reference to Grass, whose 1968 campaign efforts may or may not have had an impact on the election outcome, Hildesheimer identifies himself as a member of the political left who propagates the abolition of capitalism. However, unlike Grass, he does not become politically active in his position as writer:

The writer should make use of his name and his prominence to support a good cause, although we generally find him overestimating the value of his appeal. (...) All the writer *can* do is to justify the moral credit given to him by those who still believe in the ethics of his art and mission, and do good in every sphere offering itself. (...) But I doubt that the writer of fiction will ever be able to extend his *professional* activity to serve a great human cause. (...) He has to rely on his personal hope that his message as an essential constituent of his inner

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 133. Cf. Hildesheimer, "Ende der Fiktionen," 150. For a reading of the German translation and its reception in Germany, cf. Braese, *Die andere Erinnerung*, 416ff.

¹⁵⁰ Hildesheimer, "End of Fiction," 129.

microcosm, which is or should be his individual gift as well as his professional heritage[,] expresses itself automatically, unconsciously in his work. But he cannot choose this message. The message has to choose him.¹⁵¹

Here he repeats his earlier conviction that the message he wants to convey precedes the creative process and reveals itself automatically, though not directly, and, he adds, certainly not through the invention of reality. There is no use in submitting oneself to hard labor in order just to write about it. The writer's experience in the coal mine, for instance, is temporary and serves her literary ambition, while the experience of the real miner is permanent and defines his life. In direct reference to this particular German trend Hildesheimer posits that "the function of literature is not to turn truth into fiction but to turn fiction into truth: to condense truth out of fiction."¹⁵² While Charles Dickens may have informed the reading public about the workhouse, Hildesheimer continues, this function of literature is now ceded to mass media, and the novelist's creative impulse ought to be "*not* a direct reaction to outside events but to an inside process of sublimation."¹⁵³ If the novelist attempts to depict a fictitious event modeled after a real-life misery, he trivializes and degrades "hard and bitter facts as fiction."¹⁵⁴ It is thus Hildesheimer's "thesis that fiction has met its end."¹⁵⁵

Masante put Hildesheimer's theory into practice: with *Masante*, the author reached the end of his fiction. He acknowledged that with his literature he had not reached a large audience that, as result of reading *Tynset* or *Masante*, rose in protest against the practice of forgetting and denial. If judged by the socio-political effects or societal change that his literature might have caused, Hildesheimer failed as a writer. However, by 1975 Hildesheimer no longer believed that literature was charged with

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 129f.

¹⁵² Ibid., 131.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 136.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 138.

the mission of changing society. His microcosm was exhausted regarding the political message of the dimension of Auschwitz, at least in terms of literary production. He said what he thought “worth saying and [became] silent when it [was] said.”¹⁵⁶ On a more personal level, *Masante* allowed Hildesheimer put to rest the *Häscher* that signified the history of the Holocaust: they are “abgetan—abgeschoben. Die Angst ist vorbei. (...) Ich habe sie [=die Häscher] mir vom Leibe geschrieben.”¹⁵⁷ He reached the end “meiner Thematik als Erzähler,” although he continued to write, but no longer prose.¹⁵⁸ The process of *abtun*, as he explained in the context of his “Fiction” speech, was intricately linked to working through trauma:

Etwas anderes ist es[,] dass ein Schriftsteller ein Thema, sein Generalthema, schließlich erledigt und zu Ende behandelt hat. So ging es auch mir. Ich habe in meiner ganzen schriftstellerischen Karriere, wenn ich es so nennen darf, in meiner schriftstellerischen Entwicklung eigentlich immer nur ein Thema gehabt, in dem ich mich selbst als Substitut behandelt habe. Da ist eine bestimmte psychologische Entwicklung, und nun bin ich dieser Person ledig, ich habe sie nicht mehr, sie ist weg. (...) Ja, das hat natürlich auch etwas mit Traumata zu tun.”¹⁵⁹

In writing *Tynset* and *Masante*, Hildesheimer worked through his own past: the activity of writing provided him with a process that helped him to come to terms with

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 134.

¹⁵⁷ Hildesheimer and Durzak, “Potentielles Ich,” 285.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 276. Hildesheimer deleted most autobiographical passages in *Masante* and published them separately, as a sort of autobiography, already in 1971 (under the title *Zeiten in Cornwall*, included in vol. 1 of *Gesammelte Werke*), before *Masante*’s appearance. Cf. Hildesheimer and Durzak, “Potentielles Ich,” 282. After *Masante* Hildesheimer turned to biographies; *Mozart* (1977) and *Marbot* (1981) were both successful even internationally. Although the hero of *Marbot* was in fact a product of the author’s imagination, it was frequently reviewed as real biography. Cf. Dorrit Cohn, “Breaking the Code of Fictional Biography. Wolfgang Hildesheimer’s *Marbot*,” in *The Distinction of Fiction* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 1999), 79-95. *Mozart* and *Marbot* are published as volumes III and IV, respectively, in *Gesammelte Werke*.

Hildesheimer’s final texts, *Mitteilungen an Max über den Stand der Dinge and anderes* (1983) and *Nachlese* (1987) are included in *Gesammelte Werke* as prose pieces, however, they are not strictly prose: *Mitteilungen* is a semi-autobiographical essay addressed to Max Frisch on the occasion of Frisch’s birthday; *Nachlese* is a collection of prose fragments that Hildesheimer drafted over the years but originally rejected for publication.

¹⁵⁹ Hildesheimer and Kesting, “Ende der Fiktionen,” 54f.

the experiences of emigration, his service at Nuremberg, and life in postwar Germany as a Jew. His personal microcosm was filled with melancholic remembrance, and with *Tynset* and *Masante*, Hildesheimer brought it to articulation. Judged by his further literary and artistic production and his public interventions as a German-speaking intellectual, where thematization of the Nazi past was absent, Hildesheimer did indeed lay aside (*abtun*) his “Generalthema.” On the basis of subjective experience, Hildesheimer’s melancholy position helped him to move past the stage of *Trauerarbeit* and allowed him to move on. It is important to emphasize that Hildesheimer, unlike Sebald, who may have done so indirectly, did not prescribe a melancholy position for others. Nowhere is melancholia suggested as the ethically adequate response to genocide. The only prescriptive position Hildesheimer takes is that after Auschwitz fiction is no longer a defensible form of literature—not *only* because of the Holocaust but also in the context of the contemporary post-Auschwitz world marked by the dimension of Auschwitz, capitalism, and the destruction of the environment. In an era where mass media carry information, fiction, as the invention of reality, trivializes actual reality. What remains for writers concerned with the Holocaust—as all writers ought to be after Auschwitz—is to express their inner microcosms to sharpen readers’ awareness of catastrophe without, however, demanding they succumb to endless melancholia. The dimension of Auschwitz that is present in the shared consciousness of political culture and historical awareness must become present in *individual* consciousness. But the reader ought not be trapped in this dimension, which would cause endless melancholia. Whether the reader, as a result of her broadened individual consciousness, becomes involved in shaping shared consciousness is up to her. The author, in opening his microcosm, neither imposes nor requires her participation.

Hildesheimer's stance regarding the function of literature is clear. While it may be politically engaged via the articulation of the microcosm that automatically brings to light his political position, literature does not aim at socio-political action. As literature it evidences the author's subjectivity. It seeks communication without requiring a partner. If readers are willing to follow highly subjective chains of association—chains that Hildesheimer deems the necessary results if authors write from inside their microcosms—they may realize which “good cause” writers are supporting, but recognition alone is not followed by action: it requires neither response nor active involvement. While Hildesheimer himself thus uses a melancholy style for authentic writing of the microcosm, in which associations are set free, he does not promise or even hope that it will lead to societal change. The melancholy style works on the subjective level of the author and the reader willing to decipher it; it does not, however, present an ethically adequate response of literature to genocide, as it does not ask for cooperation by an other.

In this regard melancholia is very different from *ressentiment*: those who articulate *ressentiment* demand a response from the addressee. They express *ressentiment* to open a dialogue, and their *ressentiment* is satisfied only when others engage with it, at which point it dissolves. Therefore the next two chapters examine *ressentiment* as an alternative mode for eliciting ethical responses. My work concentrates on Jean Améry who, like Hildesheimer, contributed to the German *Literaturbetrieb* from the periphery. He entered the public scene much later than Hildesheimer but gained a growing readership during the same time period in which Hildesheimer wrote and published *Tynset* and *Masante*. At the end of his career Améry, too, was resigned, yet he despaired not at the failure of literature as such but at the lack of critical attention and willingness on part of his audience to aid him in resolving his *ressentiment* and thus release him from his past. Unlike Hildesheimer,

Améry prescribed his own affective response to his victimization—his *ressentiments* that were provoked by the inattention his original injury received by postwar Germans—as a moral guidepost. Where for Hildesheimer melancholia ultimately marked a subjective position that had validity only on the personal level but did not directly call for socio-political action, Améry identified subjective *ressentiments* of Jewish victims of Nazi persecution as an objective criterion that determined where moral repair was needed on the public, socio-political level.

CHAPTER IV

“Provokation”:¹ Jean Améry’s “Ressentiments”

In November 1964 the owner of Szczesny publishing house, Gerhard Szczesny, contacted Jean Améry to ask permission to reprint his essay on the intellectual in Auschwitz, which had appeared four days earlier in *Christ und Welt*,² in the Szczesny almanac *Club Voltaire*.³ Améry granted Szczesny’s request and related to him his own plans for a project that would include the essay but for which Améry had not yet found a publisher.⁴ Ten days after his first letter to Améry, Szczesny tentatively offered Améry a book contract, which the author accepted.⁵

Over the course of their correspondence regarding the project Améry sent Szczesny the titles of the five essays that would constitute the book, along with the book’s title. For his fourth essay he chose “Ressentiments. Ein Wort an die Deutschen,” and for the book title, *Ressentiments. Bewältigungsversuche eines Überwältigten*.⁶ The matter of *ressentiments* was central to Améry’s thought at the time, and he pursued it with urgency. However, Szczesny sensed that the word *ressentiment* and the concept it denoted might offend potential buyers; he therefore asked Améry to change the titles of both the book and the essay. The publisher’s belief

¹ The essay “Ressentiments” is “in gewisser Weise eine Provokation.” Jean Améry, letter to Helmut Heißenbüttel, February 24, 1966 (DLA 81.1601/4).

² Jean Améry, “Auschwitz--an der Grenze des Geistes. Folgerungen eines Intellektuellen aus der Begegnung mit dem Unmenschlichen,” *Christ und Welt*, November 6, 1964.

³ Gerhard Szczesny, letter to Améry, November 10, 1964 (DLA 81.2302/1).

⁴ Améry, letter to Szczesny, November 15, 1964 (DLA 81.1715a/1).

⁵ Szczesny, letter to Améry, November 20, 1964 (DLA 81.2302/2). In this letter Szczesny expressed great interest in the book project and, after Améry completed the remaining essays, sent him a contract the following year. Cf. Szczesny, letter to Améry, December 14, 1965 (DLA 81.2302/7). In the meantime Améry unsuccessfully attempted to sell his book to larger, better-known publishing houses such as Suhrkamp and Kiepenheuer & Witsch, despite the fact that he was quite fond of Szczesny’s *Club Voltaire* and its prestigious contributors. Cf. Améry, letters to Ernst Mayer (November 17, 1964; September 21, 1965), Hans Paeschke (September 4, 1965; October 6 and 27, 1965), in Améry, “Ausgewählte Briefe.”

⁶ Améry, letter to Szczesny, October 27, 1965 (DLA 81.1716a/4).

that *ressentiments* was “als negativer Begriff kaufhemmend”⁷ much surprised Améry, who had hoped that “gerade die Provokation eines solchen Titels (...) kauffördernd sei.”⁸ Rather than accepting any of Szczesny’s alternative titles for the book, Améry suggested *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*, a phrase he had used before in his 1945 text, “Zur Psychologie des deutschen Volkes.” Améry also rejected Szczesny’s title for the fourth essay, “Die Deutschen,” insisting on “Ressentiments,” “denn um diese geht es (...) doch wohl mehr als um die Deutschen.”⁹

The final product, *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne. Bewältigungsbesuche eines Überwältigten*, was published in the spring of 1966 and launched Améry’s career as “‘Star-Autor’ des Szczesny-Verlages”¹⁰ and, in the eyes of some, as West Germany’s “moralische Autorität.”¹¹ The book found its way over time into the works of Adorno, Primo Levi, and Imré Kertész among others.¹² Irene Heidelberger-Leonard and W. G. Sebald even consider *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* to be the first piece of German-

⁷ Szczesny, letter to Améry, January 24, 1966 (DLA 81.2304/1).

⁸ Améry, letter to Szczesny, January 26, 1966 (DLA 91.1717a/3). Cf. Gerhard Scheit, “Nachwort [zu *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*],” in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 2, Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne, Örtlichkeiten, Unmeisterliche Wanderjahre*, ed. Gerhard Scheit, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2002), 629-711, here 653.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Améry, letter to Szczesny, February 5, 1967 (DLA 81.1718a/4).

¹¹ “Das wissen heute eigentlich all wichtigen Leute hier.” Horst Krüger, letter to Améry, July 23, 1969 (DLA 81.2053/10).

¹² Adorno discussed Améry’s “Tortur” essay in his 1965 *Vorlesungen zur Metaphysik*; he referred to Améry in *Negative Dialektik* without naming him. Cf. Martin Vialon, “Jean Améry. Philosoph der Aufklärung im Spiegel seiner Auseinandersetzung mit Theodor W. Adorno,” in *Kritik aus Passion. Studien zu Jean Améry*, ed. Matthias Bormuth and Susan Nurmi-Schomers (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005), 119-43, here 120; Detlev Claussen, “Eine kritische Differenz. Zum Konflikt Jean Amérys mit Theodor W. Adorno und Max Horkheimer,” in *Jean Améry (Hans Maier)*, ed. Stephan Steiner (Basel, Frankfurt/M.: Stroemfeld/Nexus, 1996), 197-207. Kertész takes Améry’s “Ressentiments” as a starting point to compare *ressentiments* to his own so-called revenge by writing, Imre Kertész, “Der Holocaust als Kultur,” in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 9, Materialien*, ed. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2008), 399-414. Levi responds to Améry’s “An den Grenzen des Geists” in Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Vintage, 1989). In addition, several writers have engaged with Améry’s essays, most notably Alfred Andersch, *Efraim* (Stuttgart, Hamburg: Deutscher Bücherbund, 1967); Ingeborg Bachmann, “Drei Wege zum See,” in *Simultan* (Munich: Piper, 1972); W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2003).

language Shoah literature, unfortunately overlooking or underestimating other important Jewish-German voices in the process.¹³

Améry would publicly recall the genesis of *Jenseits* as having resulted from a chance meeting with former *Wehrmacht* soldier, active Group 47 poet, and radio host at *Süddeutscher Rundfunk* (SDR) Helmut Heißenbüttel, who had invited him to write an essay on his experience in Auschwitz.¹⁴ But Améry, who had occasionally freelanced for SDR since 1960,¹⁵ in fact sought out the radio station's support for a project that he had long planned, but for which he had little hope of realizing for lack of an audience.¹⁶ However, the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial had generated unprecedented interest in Auschwitz, and the timing seemed promising for a public broadcasting station to commit financially to Améry's project. SDR assigned Heißenbüttel, who was in charge of the division "Radio-Essay," to enter into contract negotiations with Améry. These were successful, and Heißenbüttel became, in Améry's words, "[d]ie Schlüsselfigur für meine ganze schriftstellerische Existenz."¹⁷

Within two months of their first meeting Améry finished "An den Grenzen des Geistes," which Heißenbüttel considered "einen der wichtigsten Beiträge zu diesem Thema überhaupt."¹⁸ A much shorter print version of the radio text was published in

¹³ Ralf Piorr and Jens Hoffmann, "Jean Améry und die öffentliche Sache (Interview mit Irene Heidelberger-Leonard)," *Die Wochenzeitung*, October 31 2002. In the interview Heidelberger-Leonard observes: "Améry ist ohne Zweifel der erste jüdische Schriftsteller deutscher Zunge, der Schoah-Literatur geschrieben hat." Sebald considers Améry to be the first 'authentic' voice in the literature of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* that made earlier attempts obsolete (with the exceptions of Peter Weiss and Wolfgang Hildesheimer), W. G. Sebald, "Jean Améry und Primo Levi," in *Über Jean Améry*, ed. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard (Heidelberg, Germany: Carl Winter, 1990), 115-23, here. 15f.

¹⁴ Améry recounts the story of the supposedly chance encounter with Heißenbüttel repeatedly. Cf. Améry, *Örtlichkeiten*, 470f.; Améry and Hermann, "Jean Améry im Gespräch," 97; Jean Améry, "Statt eines Vorwortes: Gestatten Sie mir, dass ich mich vorstelle" in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 9, Materialien*, ed. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2008), 15-18, here 17.

¹⁵ Cf. Heidelberger-Leonard, *Améry Revolte*, 186.

¹⁶ Améry, letter to Karl Schwedhelm, January 18, 1964, in: Améry, *Briefe*, 101f.

¹⁷ Améry and Hermann, "Jean Améry im Gespräch," 96.

¹⁸ Heißenbüttel, letter to Améry, May 13, 1964 (DLA 81.1877/5).

Christ und Welt, where it was discovered by Szczesny.¹⁹ In the meantime, Heißenbüttel agreed to broadcast Améry's still to be written sequels to the Auschwitz essay. Améry finished "Die Tortur" in January 1965, which was followed in July and November by "Wieviel Heimat braucht der Mensch?" and "Ressentiments." The author completed the series in January 1966 with "Über Zwang und Unmöglichkeit, Jude zu sein." The success of the first essay gave Améry the chance to publish in Hans Paeschke's *Merkur*, where his next essays on torture, *Heimat*, and *ressentiments* appeared before a much larger audience than radio alone could reach. With the publication of all five essays in *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*, Améry landed "ein[en] spektakuläre[n] Triumph (...), wie er nur in seltensten Fällen einem Schriftstellerleben zuteil wird."²⁰

In this chapter I focus on Améry's moral philosophy of *ressentiments*, which I link to the concept of resentment in Anglo-American moral philosophy and contrast with a specifically German understanding of *ressentiment* as influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche. I examine the unique mode of inquiry by which Améry develops and supports his concept of *ressentiment*, a line of argument that is of interest specifically because it is personal and subjective, yet still applicable outside Améry's realm of experience. Because of its applicability to Améry and to victims of persecution in general, the concept of *ressentiment* warrants analysis in the context of postwar Germany. I propose to read Améry's philosophy of *ressentiments* as an intervention in the ethical landscape of West German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, an intervention, however, that was misunderstood at best. Améry's philosophical position was not well received in his time, for it challenges the former persecutors to acknowledge and

¹⁹ Because of a misunderstanding and much to Améry's concern vis-à-vis his obligation to SDR, his Swiss news agency sold an abridged version to the Zurich *Weltwoche* long before the essay was scheduled for broadcast. In *Weltwoche* (June 6, 1964), the text served as opener to a number of articles on Nazi concentration camps that were collected for this occasion.

²⁰ Scheit, "Nachwort [zu *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*]," 669f.

apologize for wrongdoing before the past can be morally repaired. Améry's *ressentiments* were interpreted as vindictive and recriminatory, and his insistence on their moral purchase was seen as obdurate bitterness impeding social progress. Contrary to this view, I argue, *ressentiments* are necessary and salutary stimulants of vibrant and participatory *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, prompting active coming to terms with the past, in stark contrast to the passive helplessness of the melancholic affect currently privileged as the condign response to the Holocaust. That is, *ressentiment*, in the public sphere, is a viable ethical alternative to melancholia.

I introduce Améry's philosophy of *ressentiment* through a reading of his essay of the same title and two earlier texts that anticipated the 1965 essay in important ways. The essay provides of a description and analysis of *ressentiments* that is, on the one hand, specific to Améry as a Jewish victim of Nazi persecution and, on the other hand, applies to victim *ressentiments* in general as occasioned by injuries that do not receive sufficient moral attention. Améry breaks with then common interpretations of *ressentiments*, which were often influenced by Nietzsche's treatise on the concept. I argue that Améry breaks with the Nietzschean understanding of *ressentiments* by locating this concept as an affective mode in the realm of justice. Accordingly *ressentiments* become a moral sentiment because they point to past injuries in need of moral repair in the present. Améry arrives at ascribing *ressentiments* a moral value not via logical deduction but through examination of and reflection on the affective disorientation that he experiences when his past victimization lacks proper acknowledgment in postwar Germany. Thus his *ressentiments* take as their object two distinct wounds: an injury in the past, which Améry identifies in his other essays in *Jenseits*, and an injury in the present, which becomes the focus of "Ressentiments." From a reading of the latter essay, I conclude that *ressentiments* are meant to hold ethical importance for a politics of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. They are conceived as

an affective vehicle via which Améry hopes to open a dialogue with his former tormentors and postwar Germans, work through his past together with them (hence the subtitle “Bewältigungsversuche”), and thereby achieve justice and reconciliation. He poses his *ressentiments* to invite self-mistrust and critical self-reflection among the Germans—what Jürgen Habermas called suspicion, as I discuss later—so that both may be joined by a desire to undo the unjust past.

Before turning to Améry, I first revisit Anglo-American philosophical texts that address the issue of resentment and compare them with Nietzsche’s conceptualization of *ressentiment* in 1887. Nietzsche and Max Scheler—who further adapted Nietzschean *ressentiment*—influenced German understanding of *ressentiment* to such a degree that the concept was in effect incompatible with that of “resentment” in the tradition of moral philosophy. The use of the term *ressentiment* in the postwar context testifies to the prevalence in Germany after 1945 of the Nietzschean interpretation, which frames *ressentiment* in exclusively negative terms. Améry departs from this perspective to restore what he considers the moral value of *ressentiments* for the context of post-Holocaust society. His defense rests in part on an implicit distinction he draws between *ressentiment* and revenge, a distinction complicated by a short-lived flirtation with violence that itself warrants examination.

Resentment, *Ressentiment*, “Groll”: Vice or Virtue?²¹

In Anglo-American philosophical literature the treatment of “resentment” is traditionally bound up with discussions of forgiveness, the philosophical inquiry into which marks, outside a religious framework, a fairly new undertaking. It began flourishing with the heightened interest in human rights and the emergence of a field of transitional justice in the 1980s and 1990s.²² With few exceptions, discussions of forgiveness, particularly in connection with truth and reconciliation commissions late in the twentieth century, consider resentment an obstacle that ought to be overcome in order for forgiveness to proceed.²³ In a seminal study of 2008, philosopher Thomas

²¹ The negative connotations of *ressentiment* are not restricted to its use in the German language. Resentment has an equally unfavorable reputation in the English-speaking world. By its broadest definition resentment is an angry defensive response to others’ actions that are perceived to violate intentionally our expectations or norms. However, since our perception of intention and our expectations are often misguided, resentment may erupt without a proximate injury and be mixed with unpleasant emotions such as envy, bitterness, disgust, shame, and fear. For different understandings of resentment, *ressentiment*, and Améry’s *ressentiment*, cf. ch. “Resentment and Assurance,” Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Repair. Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006). In my discussion of Améry’s *ressentiment*, I focus on the moral and social role of justified resentment in the context of extreme injuries with grave moral repercussions.

²² Geoffrey Scarre states that forgiveness has been a neglected topic of moral philosophy until recently, when it emerged as a field of interest independent of the issue of punishment that had long been a concern of philosophers. Geoffrey Scarre, *After Evil. Responding to Wrongdoing* (Aldershot, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), vii. The current discourse on forgiveness is new in so far as it considers forgiveness an ethical response to human rights violations in areas that transition from oppressive regions to democracies. Jeffrie Murphy may be considered the representative authority for a group of scholars who have focused extensively on the issue of forgiveness and thereby have also touched on resentment. Cf. Jeffrie G. Murphy and Jean Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Jeffrie G. Murphy, *Getting Even. Forgiveness and Its Limits* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). See also Charles L. Griswold, *Forgiveness. A Philosophical Exploration* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Many discussions of forgiveness, especially by human rights scholars, begin with or center on the evaluation of Desmond Tutu’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which helped in transitioning from South African apartheid to democracy. Tutu’s condemnation of resentment raises important ethical questions regarding the relationship between the victimized individual, who is not ready to forgive, and institutionalized forgiving. Cf. Scarre, *After Evil*, 99f. Thomas Brudholm’s study begins with a long discussion of Tutu and the South African TRC in order to prepare his readers for an analysis of Améry’s *ressentiments*. Thomas Brudholm, *Resentment’s Virtue. Jean Améry and the Refusal to Forgive* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008).

²³ In contrast to studies that condemn resentment as obstacle to forgiveness, philosophers concerned with moral responsibility acknowledge the importance of resentment. See for instance: Walker, *Moral Repair*; R. Jay Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1994); Pamela Hieronymi, “Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62, no. 3 (2001), 529-55.

Brudholm made it his “central endeavor” to introduce transitional justice scholars to the importance of resentments in order to challenge the supremacy of forgiveness as institutionalized by Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, and he sought to accomplish this task by reading none other than Jean Améry.²⁴ Before turning to Améry, I prepare the background for my own reading of his extraordinary essay on *ressentiments* with a discussion of different treatments of resentment and *ressentiment* to uncover their distinctive features.

Almost all mention of resentment in the Anglo-American tradition makes reference to Joseph Butler, who in 1726 published two sermons, one on resentment and one on forgiveness, in which he justifies “so harsh and turbulent a Passion as Resentment” against the word of the gospel to “Love your Enemies.”²⁵ Reasoning that if indignation over injuries suffered by others is an adequate moral response and that if such indignation is “a Fellow-feeling which each Individual has in [sic] Behalf of the whole Species,” then resentment—indignation when the injury concerns ourselves rather than others—is equally “one of the common Bonds, by which Society is held together,” inasmuch as both indignation and resentment further the “Administration of Justice” when injury has occurred.²⁶ Butler is careful to distinguish injury from naturally occurring pain or loss; resentment has as its object a premeditated “Wickedness” which it has “to prevent and to remedy” (145f.): “It [=the passion of resentment] is to be considered as a Weapon, put into our Hands by Nature, against Injury, Injustice, and Cruelty” (147). Thus the teaching of the gospel “must be

²⁴ Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue*, xiv. Prior to his book, Brudholm published a summary article, Thomas Brudholm, “Revisiting Resentments. Jean Améry and the Dark Side of Forgiveness and Reconciliation,” *Journal of Human Rights* 5 (2006), 7-26.

²⁵ Joseph Butler, “Sermon VIII. A Sermon Upon Resentment,” in *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel, To Which are added Six Sermons, Preached at Publick Occasions* (London: John and Paul Knapton, 1749), 137-54; Joseph Butler, “Sermon IX. A Sermon Upon Forgiveness of Injuries,” in *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel, To Which are added Six Sermons, Preached at Publick Occasions* (London: John and Paul Knapton, 1749), 155-77. Butler opens both sermons with Matt. 5:43-44.

²⁶ Butler, “Upon Resentment,” 143f.

understood to forbid only the Excess and the Abuse of this natural Feeling.”²⁷ Butler identifies five chief abuses of resentment, four of which he dismisses as “Perverseness” because here the injury was imagined or misinterpreted and therefore provides no justification for resentment.²⁸ The fifth abuse concerns “when Pain or Harm of any Kind is inflicted meerly [sic] in Consequence of, and to gratify, that Resentment, though naturally raised” (150), that is, when the emotional state of resentment leads to an act of revenge. The purpose of resentment is to relieve injuries, and revenge goes beyond that objective by causing additional harm.²⁹ Where man has the duty to feel resentment or indignation when confronted with premeditated injury, God arrogates revenge to himself, according to Butler.³⁰ The “Passion of Resentment” must not become the passion of revenge by this account, but must leave justice to social institutions where “the cool Consideration of Reason (...) might indeed be sufficient to procure Laws to be enacted, and Sentence pass’d.”³¹ Unfortunately Butler offered no advice for cases in which these institutions do not execute their responsibility.

For Butler resentment and forgiveness co-exist. His definition of forgiveness is not the overcoming of resentment, as many of his interpreters have proposed.³² Instead

²⁷ Butler, “Upon Forgiveness,” 157.

²⁸ Butler, “Upon Resentment,” 149f. Here resentment is confused with anger or envy. It is important to note that in today’s use of the terms “to resent” and “resentment,” the same confusion still applies. When we resent someone for something, in most case we are envious or angry without the occurrence of an actual moral injury. Cf. chapter IV, 223n21.

²⁹ Cf. Butler, “Upon Forgiveness,” 160.

³⁰ Romans 12:19, “Vengeance *is* mine; I will reapey, saith the Lord.”

³¹ Butler, “Upon Resentment,” 152f.

³² In his 2003 publication in which he defends resentments as a means of self-respect, Jeffrie G. Murphy repeats his earlier reading of Butler and arrives at the same conclusion: “[A]ccording to Butler, forgiveness essentially involves the overcoming of *resentment*,” Murphy, *Getting Even*, 58. Cf. chs. 1 and 2 in Murphy and Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy*. Paul A. Newberry criticizes the apparent consensus that forgiveness is the overcoming of resentment and names Murphy as one of the main culprits who believe Butler to be the progenitor of this view. Newberry explains the frequent misinterpretation of Butler on the basis of differing underlying theories of emotion: whereas Murphy et al. assume that we have a certain control over emotions (and “turn off” resentment), Butler states that we can control actions only (in this case revenge), but have no control over emotions (such as

for Butler, “to forgive Injuries (...) is to keep clear of those Abuses before-mentioned,”³³ that is, to keep clear of revenge. The commandment to love one’s enemies is fulfilled in this view by “our natural Benevolence (...) [that] is always supposed” *unless* revenge, which “meditates [sic] Evil itself,” turns us into “the Author of Misery” (164).

Butler’s embrace of resentment as not merely a natural reaction to premeditated injury but as a requirement for justice was echoed by Adam Smith in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* published thirty years later, in which Smith writes that he “admire[d] that noble and generous resentment” (albeit a resentment subordinated to indignation).³⁴ Some twentieth-century moral philosophers refer to Butler and Smith and assert even more strongly than Butler that to react with resentment to (real) injuries to oneself is not only a natural but also a necessary response of moral agents who thereby demonstrate their commitment to moral standards.³⁵ John Rawls counts resentment as a moral feeling because it “invoke[s] the concept of right.” It detects when the moral code has been broken, and therefore it is related to our sense of justice.³⁶ In a similar vein Peter F. Strawson considers resentment one of the reactive emotions that have an evaluative element that registers the transgression of a moral norm. In contrast to Strawson, who believes indignation but not resentment to be a moral attitude, R. Jay Wallace asserts that resentment is indeed a moral sentiment.³⁷

resentment). This is an important distinction. Cf. Paul A. Newberry, “Joseph Butler on Forgiveness. A Presupposed Theory of Emotion,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62, no. 2 (2001), 233-44.

³³ Butler, “Upon Forgiveness,” 165.

³⁴ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 18. Qtd. in: Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue*, 10.

³⁵ It is of course possible to experience feelings of resentment without believing that one has been morally injured (for instance, when one does not get the job one applied for because there were applicants who were equally or better qualified than oneself), but I exclude this form of resentment from my discussion.

³⁶ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Revised ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 423.

³⁷ Cf. Wallace, *Responsibility*, 33ff. Wallace discusses Peter F. Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment,” in *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (London, New York: Routledge, 2003), 1-28. Strawson believes that indignation is a moral sentiment because it is a vicarious, reactive emotion in response to

He defines reactive emotions, including resentment, as constitutive of moral obligations in so far as they serve as a sort of control system, evaluating transgressions of moral expectations that one has accepted and to which one holds others.³⁸ As Pamela Hieronymi writes, resentment is the result of three evaluations that determine the moral attention due an injury: the seriousness of the injury, whether or not the offender can be expected to adhere to moral obligations set by his community; and whether the victim knows that he ought not be wronged.³⁹ Thus resentment is a reactive emotion to an injury to the self and a protest or protestation against the transgression of moral norms. People who never react to injuries with resentment are not “saint[s]”⁴⁰ but, on the contrary, display a deficiency in their moral constitution.⁴¹

While Butler had a lasting influence on moral philosophers of resentment in the English-speaking world, German treatment of the topic received its greatest influence from Nietzsche. His condemnation of *ressentiments* in *On the Genealogy of Morality* irrevocably changed the use of the term in philosophical discourse and common parlance, leaving no room for the positive associations present in Butler. The English-language *Oxford Companion to Philosophy* includes a discussion of Nietzschean *ressentiments* along with a brief mention of Rawls and Strawson (but not

an injury to others; by contrast, resentment is personal and in reaction to an injury to the self. Unlike Strawson, Wallace believes that we are obliged to evaluate moral transgressions that concern ourselves as well as injuries that concern others. He counts indignation *and* resentment as moral emotions.

³⁸ Cf. Wallace, *Responsibility*, 63, 66. Wallace defends as a secular concept the notion of “moral obligations” that has traditionally been associated with theological frameworks of ethics, pointing to Enlightenment moral conceptions based on practical reason that are similar to theologically informed ethics, cf. 64.

³⁹ Hieronymi, “Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness,” 530. She develops a fourth judgment to explain resentment, to which I return later.

⁴⁰ Murphy considers it equally possible that a person not responding to injury with resentment is a saint or a “servile personality” lacking self-respect, Murphy, *Getting Even*, 19.

⁴¹ Cf. Scarre, *After Evil*, 101. Strawson makes a similar point regarding social life: the lack of reactive attitudes such as resentment speaks to the objectification of human relations, thus in his judgment, a life without resentment (as well as indignation and gratitude), is an impoverished life, Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment,” 10f.

Butler) under the entry “resentment,” suggesting that the two terms are identical.⁴²

Jeffrie G. Murphy and Jean Hampton, influential contributors to current discussions of resentment (via their treatment of forgiveness),⁴³ also mistakenly conflate the concepts of resentment and *ressentiment*.⁴⁴

In her important defense of the role of resentment in moral life Margaret U. Walker cautions us not to confuse resentment with *ressentiment*. Nietzsche coined the latter term in his essays on the role of the slaves’ revolt in the founding of morality, which he assessed “as a kind of brilliant trick of the weak, who remain nonetheless despicable in their weakness.”⁴⁵ Nietzsche identified the so-called noble man as the one who “has the power to requite good with good, evil with evil, and who really also engages in requital and is therefore grateful and vengeful.”⁴⁶ By contrast,

the man of *ressentiment* is neither upright nor naïve, nor honest and straight with himself. His soul *squints*; his mind loves dark corners, secret paths and back-doors, everything secretive appeals to him as being *his* world, *his* security, *his* comfort; he knows all about keeping quiet, not forgetting, waiting, temporarily humbling and abasing himself.⁴⁷

Nietzsche famously attributed the “birth of values” to the man of *ressentiment*, who, lacking the power for real revenge, creatively replaced it with imaginary revenge⁴⁸ by which “the weakness of the weak (...) itself [becomes] a voluntary achievement, something wanted, chosen, a *deed*, an *accomplishment*.”⁴⁹ *Ressentiment* in Nietzsche

⁴² The entry was prepared by Robert C. Solomon, in Ted Honderich, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 771.

⁴³ Cf. Walker, *Moral Repair*, 113; Newberry, “Butler on Forgiveness,” 233.

⁴⁴ Cf. Murphy and Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy*. Griswold makes the same observation: Griswold, *Forgiveness. A Philosophical Exploration*, 45n5.

⁴⁵ Walker, *Moral Repair*, 120.

⁴⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human I*, in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Ernst Behler, trans. Gary Handwerk (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 51 (section I.45).

⁴⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 23 (section I.10).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 29 (section I.13).

acts as a source of transformation, turning attributes of weakness into ideals, thereby giving birth to Judeo-Christian morality, which ended the world of the noble man:

The inoffensiveness of the weakling, the very cowardice with which he is richly endowed, his standing-by-the-door, his inevitable position of having to wait, are all given good names such as ‘patience,’ which is also called *the* virtue; not-being-able-to-take-revenge is called not-wanting-to-take-revenge, it might even be forgiveness.⁵⁰

Although *ressentiments* play a key role in his critique of (slave/Judeo-Christian) morality, Nietzsche does not attempt to describe or explain them. Max Scheler sets out to correct this in his 1912 study, in which he defends Christian love against Nietzsche’s devaluation without diverging from Nietzsche’s negative assessment of *ressentiments* as such.⁵¹

Scheler attempts to approximate the French term *ressentiment* by the German “Groll” and “Grollen,” which he describes as “dunkel durch die Seele wandelndes (...) Zürnen, das durch wiederholtes Durchleben von Hassintentionen und anderen feindseligen Emotionen schließlich sich bildet.” He identifies three aspects that he considers characteristic of *ressentiment* (his preferred term, after all): it intensifies through an affective rather than intellectual memory of the injury, described as “ein Nachfühlen, ein Wiederfühlen”; it detaches itself from the original hurtful experience and grows to infect everything; and it breeds hostile intentions (2). Scheler conceptualizes *ressentiment* not as an emotion, but as a psychological disposition that develops in tandem with the repression of one or more of several affects, namely

⁵⁰ Ibid., 30 (section I.14). This “forgiveness” is, however, not real forgiveness: according to Nietzsche, the only forgiving is forgetting, and forgetting is a strength of the noble man, not the weak.

⁵¹ Max Scheler, *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen*, ed. Manfred S. Frings (Frankfurt/M.: Klostermann, 2004). Intent on refuting Nietzsche, Scheler reworked his study until the final version of 1923. He introduced a distinction between Christian love (as a universal value, cf. 29) and modern philanthropy (as product of *ressentiment*). He thus denied that *ressentiments* played a constitutive role in Christianity or Judeo-Christian morality but configured them as the source of such “Täuschungswerte(n)” (17) as bourgeois values (62ff.). From now on page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

“Rachegefühl und –impuls, Hass, Bosheit, Neid, Scheelsucht, Hämischkeit,” of which the lust for revenge is by far the most important (4).⁵² Unlike Butler, for whom resentment was an emotion and revenge an action, Scheler distinguishes between the affect of wanting revenge and the state (rather than emotion) of *ressentiment*. In the latter, the original emotion experienced at the time of the injury becomes permanent and transforms into a state detached from the original experience. If *ressentiment* intensifies through the constant “Immer-wieder-Durch- und –Nachleben der Emotion,” which is the original emotion that precedes that of wanting revenge (2)?

According to Scheler, the urge for revenge stems from the inhibition (and thus failure) to defend oneself at the moment of offense, an inhibition resulting from the anticipation of defeat were one to attempt self-defense. Scheler’s key terms are “Ohnmacht” and “Hemmung.” In the face of the offender, the offended feels impotence and helplessness (“Ohnmacht”), and the recognition of his or her own impotence leads to the physical inhibition (“Hemmung”) of acting in defense, even in small measures such as a gesture of outrage or a verbal articulation of protest (5, 7). The crucial emotion accompanying the offense is helplessness. Because of the inhibition, a defense is postponed to a time when it becomes an act of revenge; in the meantime, the offended resorts to the affect of “Rachegefühl.” If an offense is either avenged or forgiven, the injured no longer harbors vengeful feelings; if neither revenge nor forgiveness is possible, the offended repeatedly experiences helplessness and thus remembers the offense through affective memory. Over time, repetition

⁵² Avishai Margalit draws an interesting distinction between an emotion and a disposition. In discussing how we remember emotions and thereby relive them, Margalit observes that in our awareness of a disposition we may forget what triggered it, whereas reliving an emotion is tied to the original event that is constitutive of the emotion. That is, our recollection of an emotion is connected to the original trigger. Cf. Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2002), 129. This understanding is similar to Scheler’s, where a repressed emotion gives rise to a seemingly inexplicable disposition.

amounts to an inescapable emotional perception of *Ohnmacht* that becomes permanent and extends beyond the circumstances of the original assault. Moreover, as *ressentiment* grows, both the offense and the desire for revenge are repressed (8, 25f.), and all that remains is helplessness. Scheler identifies “*Ressentimentstypen*,” individuals who are prone to succumb to *ressentiment* (for instance, wives and apostates), as well as social contexts such as marriage and church that promote the development of *ressentiment* (18ff.). The most powerful *ressentiment* arises when continuous helplessness is interpreted as fate, and in agreement with Nietzsche Scheler names Jewish *ressentiment* as the strongest of all:

Das—wie Nietzsche mit Recht hervorhebt—ungeheure jüdische Ressentiment ist doppelt genährt durch das Zusammenwirken des ungeheuren Nationalstolzes dieses Volkes (“auserwähltes Volk”) mit einer Jahrhunderte als *Schicksal* empfundenen Verachtung und Zurücksetzung” (9).

Scheler concurs with Nietzsche in writing that Jewish *ressentiment* amounts to “ein[em] ganz allgemeine[m] Wertnegativismus” by which values are revaluated (27).

It is obvious from this short summary that “resentment” (as discussed in the English literature) and *ressentiment* (in Nietzsche and Scheler) correspond to different concepts. Wallace succinctly discusses their differences and concludes that *ressentiment* is about one’s lack of something that one wishes to possess, such as power.⁵³ Scheler does not consider the moral reality of an injury but focuses on the absolute helplessness experienced in the face of power so all-encompassing as to make even a word or a gesture of protest (rather than physical self-defense) impossible. In the case of *ressentiment* the injury is irrelevant for Scheler; it is the absence of power that is at stake. Resentment, on the other hand, is about the breach of moral obligations and not the lack of something one wishes to possess. As Wallace contends, the two

⁵³ Wallace, *Responsibility*, 247.

overlap and enforce each other occasionally—such as in instances where we feel entitled to a certain treatment and are disappointed not to receive it, and we imagine transgressions of moral norms by those who do.⁵⁴ Resentment here mingles with envy, and in this configuration it is closest to what Nietzsche considered *ressentiments*.⁵⁵

In his analysis of Améry's essay "Ressentiments," Thomas Brudholm takes great pains to "position Améryean *ressentiments* between the familiar concepts of resentment and *ressentiment*."⁵⁶ In his introductory chapter, he states that Améry's *ressentiments* "seem close to the morally legitimate and socially valuable emotion conceptualized as resentment in (...) moral philosophical works" but that they also "reveal(s) certain affinities to *ressentiment* as conceived by Nietzsche and Scheler."⁵⁷ Intent on rehabilitating Améry's *ressentiments* from the bad reputation that Brudholm believes they suffer because of their linguistic resemblance to Nietzsche's term, he cites evidence that supports reading Améry as a moral philosopher of resentment, concluding in his epilogue that Améry's *ressentiments* function as "resentment proper."⁵⁸ In his differentiation between resentment proper and *ressentiment* proper, and in his efforts to win for Améry the right kind of resentment, Brudholm fails to acknowledge appropriately that there is no German word for either concept. When Améry uses the French word *ressentiment*, he does so for lack of a German translation, not because he is in agreement with Nietzsche. Obviously familiar with him (even seeking an association with him by titling his book so as to evoke Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*), Améry acknowledges Nietzsche's record of *ressentiment*, but he does so in order to justify his *ressentiments* against Nietzsche.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 246f.

⁵⁵ Walker distinguishes between disgusted, bitter, envious, shamed, and fearful resentment, and her treatment of envious resentment (or resentful envy, as she also calls it) is informative, Walker, *Moral Repair*. 129-133.

⁵⁶ Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue*. 12. His emphasis.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 173.

Rather than resorting to the unsatisfactory “Groll” that Scheler had proposed (and then abandoned) or using the most literal translation “Empfindlichkeit” (suggested by *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*), Améry stuck with the French term.⁵⁹

The word *ressentiment* has been in French usage since the sixteenth century. According to the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, the noun originally denoted a strong affect of lasting quality, which allowed for positive as well as negative connotations. *Ressentiments* appear as subjects in works of Montaigne, Molière, and others, and although the meaning increasingly lost its neutrality and acquired a negative sense, it was mainly associated with the sensation of a physically injured party who may or may not pursue vengeance. The quality of *ressentiment* that is important to Améry, and which is absent in Nietzsche, is its emphasis on reflection. Beyond the suffering of pain, *ressentiment* denotes the ability to reflect on one’s injury and its effect of altering the perception of one’s surrounding. *Ressentiment* is “‘als nachhaltig bewußte Empfindung’ vor allem des Schmerzes stets reflexiv,”⁶⁰ thereby requiring that its bearer examine the feeling of anger and seek active engagement with it. The notion of reflection, inherent to the meaning of pre-Nietzschean *ressentiment* and of such importance to Améry, is also absent in the modern English rendering of the concept. Only in Butler does resentment take two forms: sudden anger that flares at the occurrence of injury but evaporates quickly and “*settled and deliberate*” resentment that reflects on the gravity of the injury and is “plainly connected with a Sense of Virtue and Vice, or moral Good and Evil.”⁶¹

⁵⁹ As Brudholm argues, Améry borrows the French term because of Vladimir Jankélévitch’s use of it in his contribution to the 1965 debate over the statue of limitations of murder in France. Cf. Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue*, 90. Nancy Wood, however, contends that Jankélévitch’s elaboration on *ressentiment* in fact postdates Améry’s and “seems directly influenced by Améry.” Both refer to the following essay: Vladimir Jankélévitch, “Shall We Pardon Them?” trans. Ann Hobel, *Critical Inquiry* 22 (1996), 552-72. I argue that, as Améry contends, *ressentiment* is a “geläufiges Fremdwort” and thus a natural choice, Améry to Szczesny, January 26, 1966 (DLA 91.1717a/3).

⁶⁰ “Ressentiment,” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer (Basel: Schwabe, 1992), 921.

⁶¹ Butler, “Upon Resentment,” 140, 143f.

According to the *Wörterbuch* entry, Nietzsche's usage permanently changed the perception of *ressentiment*, so that today it is largely associated with "ein[em] moralisch minderwertige[m] Gefühl" that needs to be overcome.⁶² How much did this common understanding influence Améry in writing "Ressentiments"? How pervasive was the term in the postwar German context?

Although he quotes Adorno, who in 1948 said that "it was already considered a form of boring *ressentiment* to remind people of the extermination of the Jews," Brudholm claims that the term *ressentiment* was uncommon in postwar Germany.⁶³ But there is no evidence in the letter exchanges between Améry and his various editors that either the term or the concept required explanation; from the cautious warnings he issues, it is quite clear that the idea of victims' *ressentiments* is expected to evoke a predictable set of responses. In a letter to Heißenbüttel that accompanies his submission of the essay for broadcast, Améry acknowledges that it "ist nun, wie man einst gesagt hätte, 'starker Tobak'—hoffentlich nicht allzu stark für Ihre Hörer."⁶⁴ Receiving no reply from Heißenbüttel, Améry worries that "die immerhin beträchtliche Vehemenz des Essays" may have caused Heißenbüttel "interne Schwierigkeiten" at the radio station.⁶⁵ When this turns out not to be the case, Améry writes Heißenbüttel that "Ressentiments" was, in fact, meant "in gewisser Weise [als] eine Provokation und ich warte schon mit einiger Ungeduld auf eventuelle Publikums-Reaktionen."⁶⁶ In contrast to Heißenbüttel, Hans Paeschke shows marked concern for the effect Améry's essay might have on the readers of *Merkur*: "Das Kapitel

⁶² "Ressentiment," in *Historisches Wörterbuch*, 922.

⁶³ Detlev Claussen, "Nach Auschwitz. Ein Essay über die Aktualität Adornos," in *Der Zivilisationsbruch. Denken nach Auschwitz*, ed. Dan Diner (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 1988), 54-69. Qtd. in: Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue*, 90; cf. Brudholm 90n10. Cf. Claussen, "Eine kritische Differenz," 198.

⁶⁴ Améry, letter to Heißenbüttel, November 24, 1965, in: Améry, *Briefe*, 142.

⁶⁵ Améry, letter to Heißenbüttel, January 26, 1966, in: *ibid.*, 161.

⁶⁶ Améry, letter to Heißenbüttel, February 24, 1966, in: *ibid.*, 164.

Ressentiments liess ich mir von Herrn Szczesny kurz geben und bin ziemlich schweißgebadet (...) [aber ich werde] die Ressentiments den Merkur-Lesern zu schlucken geben.”⁶⁷ Though Améry hoped to provoke his audience, neither Heißenbüttel nor Paeschke report any negative responses.⁶⁸

Paeschke’s caution was not entirely unjustified, as the suspicion of a *ressentiment*-laden attitude impacted public opinion and, in the instance of Jewish *ressentiments*, destroyed careers. In his study of West German historians and the historiography of the Holocaust, Nicolas Berg concentrates on Polish-Jewish historian Joseph Wulf, who settled in Germany after having been liberated from Auschwitz.⁶⁹ Wulf assiduously studied the history of the Third Reich, an occupation that brought him in touch with Améry.⁷⁰ Berg calls Wulf the earliest historian of National Socialism, yet Wulf was refused entry to the circle of academic historians and denied, in particular, any professional connection with the Munich Institute of Contemporary History, which had been founded in 1949 for the study of the Nazi era. Analyzing Wulf’s exchanges with the Institute and with Martin Broszat in particular, Berg concludes that authorship by Jewish historians was “generell tabu.”⁷¹ Under the pretext that Jewish authors had *ressentiments* and therefore could not achieve the objectivity required for historical research, they were excluded from the historical profession throughout the 1950s.⁷² Berg defends the thesis, “dass die Ressentiments,

⁶⁷ Paeschke, letter to Améry, January 10, 1966 (DLA 81.2089/1).

⁶⁸ After “Ressentiments” is aired, Heißenbüttel mentions the response of the audience in a single sentence: “Die ‘Ressentiments’ haben übrigens ein gutes Echo gehabt. Mit gut meine ich auch nicht nur auf äußerem Wiedergutmachungspathos Beruhendes.” Heißenbüttel, letter to Améry, March 22, 1966 (DLA 81.1979/3).

⁶⁹ Cf. ch. 3.3, Berg, *Der Holocaust*.

⁷⁰ The DLA *Nachlass* of Améry includes the short Wulf-Améry correspondence.

⁷¹ Berg, *Der Holocaust*, 363.

⁷² Berg arrives at this conclusion in the Wulf chapter. For a brief discussion of the changing relation between objectivity and professionalism in the twentieth century, cf. Dominick LaCapra, “Writing History, Writing Trauma,” 38f. LaCapra states that the common strategy reaching objectivity denies transferential implications, and it rejects the notion that there are “actual and desirable interactions between self and other.” More recently, LaCapra writes that in the case of extreme events, such as the Holocaust, objectification, because it impedes affective responses, puts the investigator (in our case, not

die Wulf und Poliakov [=Wulf's co-author] entgegengebracht wurden, so groß waren, dass sie von den Autoren vorweggenommen werden mussten und in die Konzeption ihrer Bände Eingang fanden."⁷³ Thus Léon Poliakov and Wulf wrote in the introduction to *Das Dritte Reich und die Juden* that they had *ressentiments* because they were Jewish, but that they drew on "übermenschliche 'wissenschaftliche' Objektivität" in order to provide for an unbiased account of the history of the Holocaust.⁷⁴ Among Jewish historians, Berg concludes, "'Ressentiments' war die immer wieder geäußerte Selbstverdächtigung."⁷⁵

Although Adorno, Wulf and Améry use the term *ressentiment* to refer to *ressentiments* held by Jewish victims, these victims' *ressentiments* are not the only ones at stake. Berg concludes that Wulf and other Jewish intellectuals anticipated the charge of *ressentiments* (and along with it, the charge of bias) because non-Jewish Germans harbored *ressentiments* against the Jews in the wake of the Holocaust. In *Von der Unfähigkeit zu trauern* Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich include a lesser-known section on taboo and *ressentiments* that offers a psychoanalytical explanation of such German postwar *ressentiments*. The Mitscherlichs explicate connections between a taboo and the *ressentiment* that develops over one's inability to violate the taboo while simultaneously observing others violate it.⁷⁶ Surveying news stories in which West Germans recount their visits to European countries where they were treated with "Ressentiments" as if "die deutschen Militaristen hier und dort Böses

Wulf but Institute members) "in the untenable or at least questionable position of the bystander," Dominick LaCapra, "Experience and Identity," *History in Transit. Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 2004), 35-71, here 70. The early Institute prized objectivity at the price of considering and engaging with victims of the Nazi regime.

⁷³ Berg, *Der Holocaust*, 363,

⁷⁴ Qtd. in: *ibid.*, 363,

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 364.

⁷⁶ Cf. Mitscherlich, *Unfähigkeit zu trauern*, 110-135.

verbrochen *hätten*,”⁷⁷ the Mitscherlichs concluded that such reports, in which euphemisms and the subjunctive cover up atrocities, show clearly that many Germans placed a taboo on “einem für unberührbar erklärten Erinnerungsbereich,” specifically on the memory of crimes committed in the name of the German people during a Nazi past that was otherwise perceived by many Germans as heroic.⁷⁸ The taboo deflected feelings of shame over the military defeat and the moral bankruptcy that had discredited one’s past. The taboo dictates not remembering a criminal history in which one’s own people is implicated, and those who obey the taboo constitute a reference group from which everyone who violates the taboo is purged. Confronted with people who openly articulate their memories of suffering inflicted by the Nazis, the reference group charges those violators with *ressentiments*, that is, with the malicious Nietzschean will not to forget and not to forgive.⁷⁹ At work here is the mechanism of projection. Because postwar Germans envied victims for their ability to speak about the past, and because they could not articulate these negative affects without admitting their own guilt, they projected their negative feelings onto others, where they are interpreted as *ressentiments*.⁸⁰ For the Mitscherlichs postwar Germans harbored “envious resentment (or resentful envy)”⁸¹ and charged with *ressentiment* those who remembered the past from the perspective of victims, but who remembered this victimization (according to the charge) with malicious delight in shaming the Germans. In the Mitscherlich presentation resentment and *ressentiment* are difficult if not impossible to distinguish.

⁷⁷ The Mitscherlichs cite a report from an international conference in Prague, where, during a sightseeing tour, the guide pointed out sites of war crimes. The quotation stems from the report, *qut. in: ibid.*, 121. Emphasis mine.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 121. The opinion polls after the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial serve as another example: 39 % of Germans do not want to learn any more of “diese Dinge,” *qtd. in: ibid.*, 123.

⁷⁹ A prominent target of postwar *ressentiments* was Karl Jaspers. Cf. Jean Paul Bier, “Jaspers 'Die Schuldfrage',” in *Deutsche Nachkriegsliteratur und der Holocaust*, ed. Stephan Braese et al. (Frankfurt/M., Germany, New York: Campus, 1998), 271-82, here 273.

⁸⁰ Cf. Mitscherlich, *Unfähigkeit zu trauern*, 111ff., 126f.

⁸¹ Walker, *Moral Repair*, 130.

What psychoanalytical projection described by the Mitscherlichs achieves is the reversal of a historical victim-perpetrator dichotomy; Germans in this dynamic see themselves as victims of unforgiving “*Ressentimentsträger*.”⁸² The controversy surrounding Thomas Mann’s return to Germany is one example of German *ressentiments*, and *ressentiments* were also felt towards and then projected onto Jewish voices, such as those of Adorno, Wulf, and Améry. The possibility that the Nazi regime’s victims justifiably felt *ressentiments* because of real crimes that were covered up did not occur to many Germans.⁸³ This was the environment of confused sensibilities, negatively laden *ressentiments*, taboos on the past, and lack of consideration for victims, in which Améry advanced his defense of *ressentiments* in order to provoke a dialogue—not a series of accusations—between former victims and perpetrators.

⁸² Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue*, 90.

⁸³ Cf. Mitscherlich, *Unfähigkeit zu trauern*, 124. In her article on Améry’s “*Ressentiments*,” Aleida Assmann discusses German *ressentiments* still in place today, exemplified for her by Martin Walser. In his 1998 speech in the Frankfurt Paulskirche accepting the German Peace Award, Walser employed a rhetoric that adhered firmly to the postwar taboo. He charged others with *ressentiments* against Germans, namely those who use Auschwitz as “*Moralkeule*” in “[der] Routine des Beschuldigens,” particularly against him, who sometimes “*nirgends mehr hinschauen kann, ohne von einer Beschuldigung attackiert zu werden*.” Martin Walser, *Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels 1998. Ansprachen aus Anlass der Verleihung* (Frankfurt/M. 1998). (Online text accessed September 15, 2010, http://www.hdg.de/lemo/html/dokumente/WegeInDieGegenwart_redeWalserZumFriedenspreis/index.html.) References to crime or responsibility were absent, despite the chosen topic. As Assmann notes further, Walser disassociated himself from precisely those intellectuals (e.g., Jürgen Habermas) who promote the transformation of Germany’s memory culture so that it includes German crimes. Aleida Assmann, “Two Forms of Resentment. Jean Améry, Martin Walser and German Memorial Culture,” *New German Critique* 90 (2003), 123-33, here 130. In an interview following his Paulskirche speech, Walser completed the reversal of the relationship between victim and perpetrator; referring to literary critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki, Walser stated: “[Er ist] der Täter, und ich bin das Opfer. (...) Herr Reich-Ranicki, in unserem Verhältnis bin ich der Jude.” Qtd. in: Briegleb, *Missachtung und Tabu*, 280.

The German preemptive accusation of *ressentiments* turns on the premise that *ressentiment* is negative. If Améry succeeds in rehabilitating *ressentiments* morally, then this tactic loses footing, because the necessary negative construction is not there to cast the target of the accusation (the victims) in a bad light.

Améry's Contribution: The "Ressentiments" Essay

In his preface to *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* Améry states that he wrote his first text on Auschwitz after twenty years of silence —challenged by the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial—and that the writing broke a “dumpfer Bann” after which “plötzlich alles gesagt sein [wollte].”⁸⁴ Améry reflects retrospectively that this book was “eine Katharsis (...), alles Verdrängte kam wieder hoch und wurde nun geistig durchgearbeit.”⁸⁵ Only during the process of writing did he discover that “ich zwar manches bedacht, aber es viel zu wenig klar artikuliert hatte.”⁸⁶

Améry employs reasoned argumentation but goes beyond empirical verification and logical deduction, using speculation and empathy to attain intellectual grounds,

Räume, in denen ‘la raison’ nicht zum flachen Raisonieren führt. Dies ist der Grund dafür, warum ich (...) stets vom konkreten Ereignis ausgehe, mich aber niemals an dieses verliere, sondern es stets zum Anlass nehme für Reflexionen, die hinausgehen über raisonnement und Raisonierfreudigkeit in Denkbezirke, über denen ein ungewisser Dämmer liegt und liegen bleiben wird. (18)

Through reflection on *ressentiments*, which was “ein langsames und mühseliges Vorwärtsschreiten im bis zum Überdruß Bekannten,” he realizes that this supposed knowledge had remained abstract for him and that the darkness of this abstraction can be illuminated only if he accepts himself as “der einzig brauchbare Ansatzpunkt” from which to reflect on the past (21). With his *ressentiments* Améry places himself at the site of the injury, from which he addresses his contemporary Germans, the majority of whom “sich nicht oder nicht mehr betroffen fühlen von den zugleich finstersten und kennzeichnendsten Taten des Dritten Reiches” (22).

⁸⁴ Améry, "Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne," 20.

⁸⁵ Améry and Hermann, "Jean Améry im Gespräch," 98.

⁸⁶ Améry, "Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne," 20. From now on page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

In a short introduction outlining the task at hand and his subject position, Améry formulates his main thesis, according to which *ressentiments* make a specific moral demand: to reverse time and history. Because it cannot be reversed in reality, time is essentially amoral, but Améry suggests a paradoxical solution that would effectively reverse history and render *ressentiment* unnecessary in his view. The essay ends with a highly pessimistic assessment of the chances that his solution will be realized. The origins of “Ressentiments” can be traced back to at least two earlier texts, which I discuss in conjunction with the 1965 essay.

Améry’s Task

Améry begins “Ressentiments” with an apology for his lack of tact. In the opening essay of *Jenseits* Améry tells of a well-meaning friend who advised him not to refer to Auschwitz too many times because his audience—West Germans—was allergic to this ostensibly geographical term, which carried historical and political significance (23). Améry disregards the advice and with it certain “Rücksichten” that have no place in examining the past he contends; he certainly does not intend to uphold a taboo (23f.). “[A]uf die Gefahr hin, schlechte Figur zu machen,” he refuses to be circumspect but wishes to illuminate (“erhellen”) his *ressentiments* for those, “gegen die sie sich richten” (120, 126).

Mir ist nicht wohl in diesem friedlichen, schönen, von tüchtigen und modernen Menschen bewohnten Lande. Warum, das hat man schon erraten: Ich gehöre jener glücklicherweise langsam aussterbenden Spezies von Menschen an, die man übereinkommensgemäß die Naziopfer nennt. Das Volk, von dem ich spreche und das ich hier anrede, zeigt gedämpftes Verständnis für meinen reaktiven Groll. Ich selber aber verstehe diesen Groll nicht ganz, noch nicht—und darum will ich mir in diesem Aufsatz über ihn klar werden (...). Ich spreche als Opfer und untersuche meine Ressentiments. (119)

On a rhetorical level, this passage foreshadows the general tone of the essay, which oscillates between the descriptive-argumentative and the polemical, and between sincerity and irony.⁸⁷ On another level, this passage also establishes the basic parameters of the essay's argumentational structure: the topic (*ressentiments*), the problem (incomprehension), the task (clarification), the point of view (that of those victimized by the Nazis), and the addressee (all Germans, regardless of background).⁸⁸

As Brudholm astutely observes, Améry's task quickly shifts from clarification and analysis to shielding his *ressentiments* from condemnation.⁸⁹ Rather than coming to understand why he harbors *ressentiments*, Améry's objective becomes the justification of this affect, which is frowned upon by "Moralisten und Psychologen" alike (121). In particular he registers the need to defend his *ressentiments* against Nietzsche, whose works are widely regarded as the final word on the topic, and against psychologists, who view *ressentiments* as a lingering injury of imprisonment, which they dismiss as "KZ-Syndrom(s)." Both Nietzsche and the psychologists view bearers of *ressentiments* as "verbogen" (126f.). With this in mind Améry settles on the ultimate task of his essay and puts forward a thesis that is extraordinary in the postwar context: "[Verbogen zu sein] stellt mir aber auch die Aufgabe, unsere Verbogenheit neu zu definieren: und zwar als eine sowohl moralisch als auch geschichtlich der gesunden Gradheit gegenüber ranghöhere Form des Menschlichen" (ibid.). *Ressentiments* are, in Améry's conception, the "Emotionsquelle jeder echten Moral" (148). Beyond a mere philosophical category, *ressentiments* fulfill a social function in

⁸⁷ Améry's shifting terminology ("Groll" and *ressentiment*) further complicates the understanding of the essay, as evidenced by a number of different interpretations. Cf. ch. 13, Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue*, 160-169.

⁸⁸ Cf. Ibid., 83.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 92. Améry's vocabulary changed from "über [Ressentiments] klar werden" and "untersuche[n]" (119) to "radikale Analyse" (120), "Justifizierung" (121), and, finally, to "[Ressentiments] schirmen" (127).

the public sphere, and it is this function, overlooked by Nietzsche and psychologists, about which Améry intends to educate his German audience.

Améry is thus more concerned with morality and history than with justice in a legal sense. At stake is the moral repair of past wrongdoings rather than a judicial confrontation with the past, the failure of which he found amply demonstrated. Were Améry to draw conclusions from reading “Kempner, Reitlinger, und Hannah Arendt,” he would justify *ressentiments*,

weil auf der öffentlichen Szene Westdeutschlands immer noch
Persönlichkeiten agieren, die den Peinigern nahestanden, weil trotz der
Verlängerung der Verjährungsfrist für Schwer-Kriegsverbrechen die
Verbrecher eine gute Chance haben, in Ehren alt zu werden und uns—
triumphierend, dafür bürgt ihre Aktivität in ihren großen Tagen—zu
überdauern. (120)⁹⁰

Disappointment with judicial failings does not trigger Améry’s *ressentiments*; instead, they are prompted by his growing recognition that just twenty years after their defeat, Germans have regained the “Zufriedenheit des guten Gewissens” (147).

The Origins of Améry’s Ressentiments

It is important to note that Améry believes it is not his injuries themselves, but society’s failure to acknowledge them properly, that is the seed of his *ressentiments*. Améry remembers that on the day of his liberation from Bergen-Belsen he harbored no *ressentiments* for his manifold injuries, neither torture nor imprisonment, nor the loss of both *Heimat* and language (lost by sharing both with his tormentors) provoked resentful feelings, because Améry was certain in 1945 that the world’s contempt

⁹⁰ Améry most likely refers to British historian Gerald Reitlinger, whose books *The Final Solution* and *The S.S.* were translated into German in 1956 and 1957. Robert Kempner was the German-Jewish attorney who served as the assistant to U.S. chief prosecutor Robert H. Jackson at the Nuremberg IMT. He is credited with the discovery of the Wannsee protocol.

would reduce a morally bankrupt Germany to a “Kartoffelacker- und Ruinen-Deutschland” without political or economic power (123).

Améry does not exaggerate here. From a text completed in 1945—and probably begun in Auschwitz⁹¹—it is clear that he believed Germany had isolated itself irretrievably and was a pariah. In “Zur Psychologie des deutschen Volkes” he wrote that the most tragic period of German history was about to *begin*, and that this was the moment Thomas Mann had predicted with his fictional Goethe’s speech: “Ich habe Angst, dass einmal der gebundene Welthass sich gegen das deutsche Volk richten könnte...”⁹² Améry contended that all Germans were collectively guilty according to international opinion and subject to hatred and revenge. In his 1945 writings he distanced himself from the verdict of collective guilt. Because he did not believe in the collective guilt of the Germans that justified calls for revenge, he sought to articulate a pedagogic project for their moral reeducation.⁹³ In contrast to Hannah Arendt, who denied the “Verantwortungsfähigkeit” of the Germans,⁹⁴ Améry firmly believed that the German people were able to assume moral responsibility, which in itself would already contribute to their moral betterment. The Nazi elite, however, which had undergone an irreversible “Erziehung der Umenschlichkeit” to reach their Nietzschean goal of total power, was beyond the realm of education and corrigibility in his view, and Améry demanded their “physische Extermination” regardless of

⁹¹ Cf. Scheit, “Nachwort [zu Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne],” 630.

⁹² Améry, “Zur Psychologie des deutschen Volkes,” 500. The British chief prosecutor would use the same quote in his opening remarks at the Nuremberg IMT; however, he mistakenly attributed it to the historical Goethe. Cf. Stephan Braese, “Versetzte Gleichzeitigkeit. Darstellungen bis 1949,” in *Shoah in der deutschsprachigen Literatur*, ed. Norbert Otto Eke and Hartmut Steinecke (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2006), 21-42, here 25.

⁹³ “Wir wollen nochmals festhalten: Der begangenen infernalischen Greuel in Konzentrationslagern und Gefängnissen hat sich das deutsche Volk in seiner Gesamtheit nicht schuldig gemacht.” Améry, “Zur Psychologie des deutschen Volkes,” 525.

⁹⁴ Arendt, “Organisierte Schuld,” 31. Améry does not reference Arendt directly. Arendt’s article appeared in English in 1945.

individual guilt.⁹⁵ Aside from this numerical minority, he felt, the Germans were by and large good-natured (“gutartig”) and, though guilty of failing to prevent the Nazi crimes, “umerziehbar (...) und besserungsfähig.”⁹⁶ The task of reeducation fell to those intellectuals who had upheld German spirit (“Geist”) within the Third Reich all along, namely to members of the inner emigration. Despite their failure at political opposition, Améry credited them with the continuation of *Geist*, if “man überhaupt geneigt [ist], sie [=Neuerziehung] ernstlich und mit brauchbaren Mitteln zu unternehmen.” Améry failed to clarify to whom the “man” refers, to the carrier of *Geist* or the German people.⁹⁷ Despite the optimism permeating the text, Améry left his reader with a final doubt as to whether the Germans would ever understand the term humanity (“Humanität”) in more than merely abstract-philosophical terms, that is, if they would ever act on it politically and morally.⁹⁸

In a second text predating “Ressentiments” by just a few years, Améry revisited the question of German reeducation. “Im Schatten des deutschen Geistes” was part of a series of essays Améry wrote between 1958 and 1961, and which he published in 1962 as *Geburt der Gegenwart*. Introducing a book on cultural developments in Western countries (Germany, France, Great Britain, and the U.S.) since 1945, he recalled that after the end of the war, after “Coventry, Hamburg, Lidice, Dresden, Oradour, nach Auschwitz und Malmédy,”

⁹⁵ Améry, “Zur Psychologie des deutschen Volkes,” 509, cf. 509-513. Améry’s recommendation recalls Morgenthau’s plan to execute all “arch-criminals.” It circumvents the problem that the prosecution later faced at the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials, namely proving murderous intention for each defendant. For Améry, membership in any of the Nazi elite groups was evidence enough of murderous intentions, regardless of individual action. In his membership acceptance speech at *Deutsche Akademie*, Améry explicitly introduced himself as someone who had fully agreed with the Morgenthau plan that was still a “sehr milde Lösung,” Améry, “Statt eines Vorwortes,” 16. In 1945 Améry also demanded that all writings of Nietzsche be destroyed. While others were already rehabilitating Nietzsche from the reputation as the favorite philosopher of National Socialism, Améry was adamant about his assessment of Nietzsche, and this would not change.

⁹⁶ Améry, “Zur Psychologie des deutschen Volkes,” 526.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 534.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 534. “Wir getrauen uns nicht abzuschätzen, (...) ob dieses Volk also jemals *politisch* den Begriff der Humanität erfassen wird.”

Deutschland (...) vor der Nötigung einer kollektiven politischen Auto-Psychoanalyse [steht]. Es steht vor dem geschehenen Weltunheil, das ihm zur Last gelegt wird, und es soll an seine Brust schlagen, so fordern es die Völker und so verlangen es seine eigenen Söhne, sofern sie sich unschuldig wissen an den Taten des Dritten Reiches. Die Aufgabe ist schwer. Zu schwer. Dass Deutschland sich weigern wird, sie zu lösen, liegt auf der Hand.⁹⁹

While he acknowledged the refusal of Germans to make amends, i.e., to beat their chests in admission of guilt and supplication for forgiveness,¹⁰⁰ Améry did not articulate *ressentiments* over this—not yet. It appears that in the late 1950s he was merely an observer; he subordinated the issue of moral rehabilitation to the question of cultural development. However, from the chapter on Germany (“Im Schatten des Dritten Reiches”), it becomes clear that he took postwar literature as a point of departure in addressing the question of whether West Germany had broken with its history of National Socialism. He observed that postwar literary production was dominated by a handful of non-Jewish writers who wrote dubious (“zweideutig”) works, and he concluded that because no revolution against Hitler had taken place, most literature—including that of Alfred Andersch, for instance—remained in the shadow of the Third Reich.¹⁰¹

Améry stated in “Im Schatten des Dritten Reiches” that he arrived at this conclusion during his first visit to West Germany (in 1952), when

⁹⁹ Jean Améry, *Geburt der Gegenwart. Gestalten und Gestaltungen der westlichen Zivilisation seit Kriegsende* (Olten, Freiburg i.B.: Olten, 1961), 11.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Luke 18:10-14.

¹⁰¹ Améry, *Geburt der Gegenwart*, 13. The Germany chapter is republished in the *Werke* edition: Jean Améry, “Im Schatten des Dritten Reiches (Deutschland-Kapitel aus: *Geburt der Gegenwart*),” in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 2, Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne, Unmeisterliche Wanderjahre, Örtlichkeiten*, ed. Gerhard Scheit, *Jean Améry Werke* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2002), 535-99, here 560-578. Améry is critical of the debate between actual and inner emigration that distracts from the main problem: the absence of Jewish writers. The return of non-Jewish German emigrants was politically possible, whereas Jewish emigrants’ return was emotionally impossible, in Améry’s view, due to “Millionen Leichen” blocking the way. Cf. Améry, *Geburt der Gegenwart*, 13; Améry, “Im Schatten des Dritten Reiches,” 563.

“Wehrmachtsdeutsch” and the “Blick von damals” belied the first impression by which Germany seemed “ein vollständig fremdes Land” and the Germans a bettered people.¹⁰² On this visit he had also noticed that the media were dominated by a “Mischung von moralischer Aburteilung des Dritten Reiches mit dem komplizenhaften Augenzwinkern nach den ‘kleinen Leuten,’ die dieses Reich trugen” (545) and thus he was unconvinced that German democracy was built on anything more than sand:

Wenn dennoch sich kein glückliches Verhältnis herstellen will zwischen dem Besucher und diesem Lande, dann müssen die Gründe hierfür wohl im Politischen liegen. Das unklare Gefühl, dass alle Herrlichkeit dieses Landes, die demokratische der klaglos funktionierenden Institutionen, die wirtschaftliche, die kulturelle, die soziale, auf Sand gebaut ist, legt sich dem Gast drückend auf die Brust und lässt ihn nicht wieder froh werden. (Ibid.)

For this reason, Améry considered the pedagogic project of reeducation to have failed and resorted to explaining the reasons for its failure. With his growing disappointment he recognized that it was, after all, the “Mehrheit der individuellen Deutschen” who were implicated in Nazi crimes and who would not accept their murderous past as national history because many of them regarded the Third Reich as the “Epoche mit dem persönlich-existentiellen Höhepunkt” (550). The “*deutsche Revolution*”—either politically in the past or morally in the present—would have been the only possibility, “das Dritte Reich zu überwinden und gleichzeitig dialektisch ins Geschichtsbewußtsein einzugliedern” (553). The conflict between “dem geschichtlich ehrlosen, persönlich aber vielfach ehrenvollen Abenteuer des Dritten Reiches” experienced by many Germans crippled their capacity to follow democracy wholeheartedly. This resistance, coupled with Cold War policies that fostered Allied

¹⁰² Améry, “Im Schatten des Dritten Reiches,” 538, 541. From now on page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

leniency towards Nazi criminals, undermined attempts at democratization, in his view, which were dwarfed by “Vertuschung und Restauration” (558).¹⁰³ Hence Améry’s unhappy relationship (“kein glückliches Verhältnis,” 545) with Germany gave rise to his *ressentiments*.

The 1965 essay echoes Améry’s earlier sentiments and directly links his *ressentiment* to the German *Wiederaufbau* and the economic miracle in particular. Instead of having turned into a potato field, bereft of any political or economic power, Améry writes, Germany quickly became, because of Cold War politics that released the country from its pariah existence, one of the most important Western European nation-states and therefore “guter Boden” not for potatoes but for Améry’s *ressentiments* (124f.). What Améry had believed to be international consensus that intended for Germany to become nothing but an agricultural wasteland, never again to pose a military threat, was quickly replaced by a different consensus, namely that “[n]ur ganz verstockter, moralisch verdammenswerter und geschichtlich schon abgeurteilter Hass (...) sich an eine Vergangenheit [klammere], die offensichtlich nichts anderes war als ein Betriebsunfall (...) an dem das deutsche Volk in seiner Breite und Tiefe keinen Anteil hatte” (126). Rather than beating their chests, Améry felt that Germans quickly began to concentrate on their own suffering during and after the war and chose to come to terms with the past “auf ihre Art” by channeling all energy towards the economy, thus *avoiding* the past (125). “Der Deutsche, erwachend aus der gewaltigsten Niederlage seiner Geschichte, vollzog nach dem Kriege eine *Flucht in die Wirtschaft*.”¹⁰⁴ This assessment preceded the Mitscherlichs’ conclusion,

¹⁰³ Adorno arrived at similar conclusions at approximately the same time (1959), Theodor W. Adorno, “Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit,” in *Theodor W. Adorno, Gesammelte Schriften Bd. 10/2. Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft II*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1997), 555-72.

¹⁰⁴ Améry continues, “Er machte die Wirtschaft zu seiner großen persönlichen und nationalen Aufgabe.” Améry, “Im Schatten des Dritten Reiches,” 597f. In the 1945 text, Améry had pointed out already the one national characteristic he could detect among Germans: their dedication to work. He arrives at an explanation for National Socialism that does not focus on militarism but on the

that the resurrection of the economy, rather than the construction of a strong democracy, became the Germans' "Lieblingskind."¹⁰⁵

The Time-Warp of Ressentiment

By contrast Améry insists in 1965 on the truth of the collective guilt thesis, not because Germans shared a collective mindset (which would be "blanker Unsinn"), but because the sum of all forms of guilt—"Tatschuld, Unterlassungsschuld, Redeschuld, Schweigeschuld"—statistically implicates all of them (134f.).¹⁰⁶ Although the notion is taboo and "unberührbar," Améry must "an ihm festhalten" to be true to his experience as victim of collectively administered crimes (134), yet the discrepancy between his judgment of collective guilt and the world's consensus of collective innocence ("kollektive Unschuld") renders him an outcast: "*Ich bin belastet mit der Kollektivschuld, sage ich: nicht sie. Die Welt, die vergibt und vergisst, hat mich verurteilt, nicht jene, die mordeten oder den Mord geschehen ließen*" (138).

internalization of work, as Germans deemed work to be a duty to follow, no matter whether the work was meaningful. The Nazis knew how to take advantage of this mindless adherence to duty, and Améry declares the "irrationale Bessenheit von (gleichgültig welcher) Sache, die man um 'ihrer selbst willen tut,' das heißt, (...) von der man nicht weiß, warum man sie tut" to be the origin of unquestioning German support of Nazi policies. Améry, "Zur Psychologie des deutschen Volkes," 517f. Gerhard Scheit believes that a comparable concept is at work in Hannah Arendt's "Selbstlosigkeit." Scheit, "Nachwort [zu Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne]," 633. On her 1950 visit to Germany, Arendt recognized a "Selbstlosigkeit" in the Germans' "fiebrhafte[n] Geschäftigkeit" of processing the past: "Beobachtet man die Deutschen, wie sie geschäftig durch die Ruinen ihrer tausendjährigen Geschichte stolpern und die für die zerstörten Wahrzeichen kein Achselzucken übrig haben[,] oder wie sie es einem verübeln, wenn man sie an die Schreckenstaten erinnert, welche die ganze übrige Welt nicht loslassen, dann begreift man, dass die Geschäftigkeit zu ihrer Hauptwaffe bei der Abwehr der Wirklichkeit geworden ist." Hannah Arendt, "Die Nachwirkungen des Naziregimes. Bericht aus Deutschland," in *In der Gegenwart. Übungen im politischen Denken II* (Munich: Piper, 2000), 38-63, here 45. Améry clearly mirrored Arendt's thought in "Im Schatten des Dritten Reiches."

¹⁰⁵ Mitscherlich, *Unfähigkeit zu trauern*, 19.

¹⁰⁶ Améry makes second mention of Meister Pfeiffer. While in Auschwitz, Améry worked as a clerk at I.G. Farben under the supervision of Pfeiffer. In the 1945 "Psychologie" text, Améry describes Pfeiffer as "ein[en] gutartige[n] Mensch[en]," who suffered from the German disease of valuing work over life, therefore treating his workers brutally (515). By 1965, Améry's benevolent, even apologetic, stance towards Pfeiffer has changed completely. Pfeiffer is one of the examples Améry lists in his discussion of German guilt in which all were implicated (137).

For Améry this postwar isolation recalls his loneliness during torture. The original injury of the past, because it remains unrecognized, is experienced continuously in the present: the postwar injury prevents the wound of the original injury from healing. The affectively inflected memory keeps Améry, in Schelerian manner, tied to his past. He is aware that with the passing of time the gap widens between him and the future-oriented society in which he lives. He reflects on this condition in one of the most striking passages of the essay:

Es ist meinem Nachdenken nicht unentdeckt geblieben, dass das Ressentiment nicht nur ein widernatürlicher, sondern auch ein logisch widersprüchlicher Zustand ist. Es nagelt jeden von uns fest ans Kreuz seiner zerstörten Vergangenheit. Absurd fordert es, das Irreversible solle umgekehrt, das Ereignis unereignet gemacht werden. Das Ressentiment blockiert den Ausgang in die eigentlich menschliche Dimension, die Zukunft. Ich weiß, das Zeitgefühl des im Ressentiment Gefangenen ist verdreht, ver-rückt, wenn man will, denn es verlangt nach dem zweifach Unmöglichen, dem Rückgang ins Abgelebte und der Aufhebung dessen, was geschah. (...) Jedenfalls kann aus diesem Grunde der *Mensch des Ressentiments* nicht einstimmen in den unisono rundum erhobenen Friedensruf, der da aufgeräumt vorschlägt: Nicht rückwärts lasst uns schauen, sondern vorwärts, in eine bessere, gemeinsame Zukunft! (128, emphasis mine)

Améry's self-description as the "man of resentiments" evokes, of course, a comparison with the Nietzschean man of *ressentiments* who (in Dostoevsky's literary realization) never forgets but "remembers [his] injury down to the smallest, most ignominious details" and demands repayment with an "interest accumulated over all the years."¹⁰⁷ Brudholm argues that Améry's image of the *ressentiment*-laden victim more closely resembles Walter Benjamin's angel of history, who gazes at the past with the desire to undo it.¹⁰⁸ Recall Benjamin's angel of history:

¹⁰⁷ F. M. Dostoevsky, "Notes from the Underground," in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The New American Library, 1975), 60.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue*, 105, 109.

His eyes are wide, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. Where a chain of events appears before *us*, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed.¹⁰⁹

Brudholm draws the connection between Améry and Benjamin's angel based on their repulsion at the sight of history. The angel's wings become caught in the storm of progress that transports him into the future, but to which he keeps his back turned. *Ressentiment* similarly fixes Améry with his back to the future and his gaze upon the past, absurdly demanding that he would turn back time and undo history. This is the condition that psychologists designate as "verbogen" and that impedes its bearer's well-being, as Améry freely admits. But he defines it as a form of humanness morally superior to future-oriented forgiveness. Améry is invested in a social and philosophical concept of *ressentiment* that is applicable to human, not angelic, terms of morality. With indirect reference to the angel of history while simultaneously addressing proponents of forgiveness, Améry states he is too "flügellos" and will therefore resist "dem ethischen Höhenflug" dictated by those who concentrate on the future and demand of him "hochfliegend" to internalize his injury and practice emotional asceticism (128f.).¹¹⁰ Rather than flying backwards into the future, like the angel of history, Améry does not fly at all. This does not mean that he does not conceive of a possible future. However, he will not reach the future as long as his *ressentiments* tie him to his past.

This warped condition, by which one's possession by the past blocks the future, might seem to resemble the condition of traumatic experience, though it would

¹⁰⁹ Benjamin, "Concept of History," 392.

¹¹⁰ Améry refers by name to the Jewish-French publicist André Neher, who advocates silence and thereby, according to Améry, "emotionelle(r) Askese" in regard to one's suffering. Améry charges him with demanding from the victims the same sort of internalization that Neher presumes the perpetrators practice vis-à-vis their guilt. Améry refuses to engage in that form of "Parallelismus" (129).

perhaps be wise not conflate the two. As has been widely suggested, Benjamin's distinction between *Erlebnis* (as isolated experience) and *Erfahrung* (as integrated experience) is helpful in understanding trauma, which entails an extreme event that its victim is intellectually and emotionally unable to comprehend fully and contextualize and which remains unintegrated unless it is worked through.¹¹¹ Dominick LaCapra argues that traumatic experience, in contrast to a traumatic event, which is situated at a specific point in the past, is elusive and invades the present with memories of the past. Traumatic memory, he continues, "lives on experientially and haunts or possesses the self," thus effectively collapsing past and present and foreclosing the possibility of engaging in the present as social agent.¹¹² Both Sebald and Brudholm connect Améry's temporal warp to hypermnesia, William Niederland's term for traumatic memory as an overstimulation of affectively inflected memory of the past intruding into the present.¹¹³ Améry himself asserts that he is "nicht 'traumatisiert'" (175) and rejects the notion of Niederland's survivor's syndrome because it objectifies the subjective experience by labeling it as pathological (127).¹¹⁴

The issue at hand is not to decide whether Améry suffered from traumatic experience (or whether his suicide was a delayed consequence of his trauma), but to put *ressentiment* and its temporal sensibility in the larger context of trauma, which is not limited to processes of acting out but also covers those of working through. Rather than acting out traumatic experience, I argue, *ressentiments* figure in the realm of

¹¹¹ Cf. Benjamin, "Baudelaire," 319. LaCapra, "Experience and Identity," 55; Dominick LaCapra, "Trauma Studies: Its Critics and Vicissitudes," *History in Transit. Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press), 106-143, here 117.

¹¹² LaCapra, "Experience and Identity," 55f.

¹¹³ Sebald, "Jean Améry und Primo Levi," 121f. Cf. William Niederland, *Folgen der Verfolgung. Das Überleben-Syndrom* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1980), 230; Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue*, 107.

¹¹⁴ Améry refers directly to H. Paul and H. J. Herberg, *Psychische Spätschaden nach politischer Verfolgung* (Berlin, New York: Karger, 1967). It is safe to assume that he was familiar with William Niederland, who first described the survivor syndrome in 1961. Jan Philipp Reemtsma has discussed the "Ressentiments" essay as evidence of Améry's trauma. Cf. Jan Philipp Reemtsma, "172364. Gedanken über den Gebrauch der ersten Person Singular bei Jean Améry," in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 9, Materialien*, ed. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2008), 467-504, here 498ff.

working through. The processes of working through and acting out are closely linked, as both involve the repetition of traumatic events. However, as J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis have argued, repetition in working through is “modified by interpretation and—for this reason—liable to facilitate the subject’s freeing himself from repetition mechanisms.”¹¹⁵ In working through, but not acting out, victims are able to distinguish between past and present; they recognize that they are living in the present with memories of the past. By no means is the goal of working through to achieve full closure by which the past is forgiven; rather, it acknowledges the past as a residue or “stain” that will indefinitely remain.¹¹⁶

In agreement with LaCapra’s perspective on working through trauma as “the effort to articulate or rearticulate affect and representation in a manner that may never transcend, but may to some viable extent counteract, a reenactment, or acting out,” I understand Améry’s articulation of and reflection on his affective state of *ressentiment* as an effort to work through.¹¹⁷ Améry may not have been traumatized, but *ressentiments* require processes of working through that are similar to those necessary in the aftermath of traumatic events. Through the genre of exploratory essay, which may itself relate to processes of working through,¹¹⁸ Améry apprehends his past in a way that is meaningful for his present without trying to overcome the past. His *ressentiments* constitute an affective demand to reverse time; but rather than submitting to this absurd demand and acting out compulsively, Améry offers a

¹¹⁵ J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1974), 488f. LaCapra compares the processes of working through and acting out in the conclusion: Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust. History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 205-224.

¹¹⁶ Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 1998). 187.

¹¹⁷ LaCapra defines trauma as the dissociation between affect and representation: “one disorientingly feels what one cannot represent; one numbingly represents what one cannot feel,” LaCapra, “Writing History, Writing Trauma,” 42.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Dominick LaCapra, Interview for Yad Vashem (June 9, 1998),” *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press), 141-180, here 178.

solution that requires Germans to accompany him in his task of working through, thus effectively freeing him from his loneliness if not from his past.

The Subjective Role of Améry's Ressentiments

The irreversibility of time, according to Adorno, “gibt ein objektives moralisches Kriterium ab.”¹¹⁹ Améry's essay is in essence a rebuttal of Adorno's statement. According to Améry, it is the irreversibility (“Irreversibilität”) of time that is the cornerstone of amorality. *Ressentiments* are the reminder that the notion of time healing of all wounds is a platitude sidestepping genuine moral repair. Any German consensus that time will bring about forgetting or forgiving confuses, in Améry's view, the physiological process of healing wounds with the emotional and mnemonic labor of working through that has little to do with time. For Améry, time itself has “nicht nur außer-, sondern *wider*moralischen Charakter.” Therefore

[fordert] der sittliche Mensch (...) [die] Aufhebung der Zeit—im besonderen, hier zur Rede stehenden Fall: durch Festnagelung des Untäters an seine Untat. Mit ihr mag er bei vollzogener moralischer Zeitumkehrung als Mitmensch dem Opfer zugesellt werden. (133f.)

The demand for the irreversibility of time is not to be met in real time, but in the realm of moral truth by attempting to actualize the conflict that, in a moral sense, has not yet taken place (“Aktualisierung (...) des ungelösten Konflikts,” 129). The conflict is to be actualized by the victim's *ressentiment*, which in turn provokes “Selbstmisstrauen” in the perpetrator. Améry formulates a concrete task via which both sides, victims and perpetrators, work through and master (“meistern”)—but not forget—the past, as it is in spite of “ihrer radikalen Gegensätzlichkeit” their shared past (142). Améry is at the

¹¹⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2003), 88. I am still struggling with “Reversibilität” and whether Améry means reversal or reversibility by it. I believe that the reversibility of time is at the heart of his discussion: time is amoral because it can not ever be reversed. The reversibility of time would allow for a reversal of history.

present the prisoner of “der *moralischen* Wahrheit des Konflikts” (130), and he seeks release from the “noch immer andauernden Verlassensein von damals” that, though originating with his experience of torture, extends to the present because neither his perpetrator nor the majority of Germans have morally realized the crime (131). He desires to pull his tormentor and postwar Germans into “die Wahrheit seiner [=des Verbrechers] Untat” so that they regret the past and desire to undo it as much as Améry does (131). In that instant, Améry and his tormentor would meet and hence transform their existence as counterhumans (“Gegen-Menschen”) back into a pre-crime relationship among fellow human beings (“Mitmenschen”). The moral reversal of time would be complete (131), and the demand of Améry’s subjective *ressentiments* would be met.¹²⁰ The reversibility of time is possible only in the subjunctive and can never be achieved in real time, yet for Améry the impossibility coexists along the possibility of desiring that time is reversible. This possibility allows for the otherwise impossible reversibility of time in moral terms.

Though she never mentions Améry, Pamela Hieronymi develops a theory of resentment that comes close to his understanding of *ressentiment*.¹²¹ Hieronymi seeks a concept of “uncompromising forgiveness”—that is, a form of forgiving that writes over an injury without erasing it, thus leaving behind a visible stain as reminder of the

¹²⁰ In the second essay of *Jenseits* on his torture experience Améry reflects on how the relationship between individuals radically changes as soon as one human being violates the physical boundaries of another purposefully and without intentions to relieve pain. With the first blow, “Weltvertrauen”—the trust in a world that rests on the reasonable expectation to receive help from an external agent when the body is in pain—is shattered. What accompanies the destruction of trust in the world is the transformation from *Mit-Mensch* to *Gegen-Mensch*. Eugene Goodheart argues that Améry’s call for self-mistrust on the side of the Germans is essentially a demand to avenge himself for the loss of trust in the world, cf. Eugene Goodheart, *The Reign of Ideology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 161. In “Die Tortur,” Améry essentially establishes a definition of National Socialism that rests on the assumption that the domination of *Gegen-Menschen* is its principle, cf. *Jenseits*, 63-67, 69-72. He closes the essay by saying that torture left him in the permanent emotional state of fear and *ressentiment* (85). Améry’s reflections on Nazi morality is repeated (and much expanded) by: Jonathan Glover, *Humanity. A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2000). (Glover does not mention Améry, however.)

¹²¹ Hieronymi, “Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness.” From now on page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

injury.¹²² She associates uncompromising forgiveness with the articulation of resentment, which she describes as protesting “*a past action that persists as a present threat*.” The present threat lies in the implicit claim that a morally unrepaired injury makes about the injured party, i.e., that it is acceptable to treat a person in such a way. Hieronymi writes: “That—that claim—is what you resent. It poses a threat. In resenting it, you challenge it. If there is nothing else that would mark out that event as wrong, there is at least your resentment” (546). Unlike Nietzsche and Scheler, who frame *ressentiment* as a passive attitude of the helpless, Hieronymi stresses that resentment “*is a fight response*” (emphasis hers) that attacks the meaning of the injurious event (which in the absence of its acknowledgment as injury has no affirmative moral meaning) by affirming its wrongness (547). According to Hieronymi, resentment seeks not revenge but acknowledgment of the injury. Hieronymi mirrors Améry in contending that resentment challenges the tormentor to “*himself* renounce(s) the deed,” an act by which he “joins the victim in repudiating the wrong,” thus revoking the threatening claim and satisfying resentment (548, 521). In addition to the three judgments that Hieronymi related to resentment (concerning the injury, the injurer, the injured), she describes a fourth evaluation, of whether the injury goes unacknowledged and thereby poses a threat. It is this fourth judgment that *finds* resentment. Acknowledgment of the injury, e.g., in the form of an apology, undermines this fourth judgment such that resentment loses its footing without, however, calling into question the other three judgments. While the threat has passed and resentment *qua* protest is resolved, there is no need to abandon the notion that the

¹²² Avishai Margalit points out that forgiveness is often conflated with the pretense that an injury did not happen in the past. Yet even God leaves a mark on Cain, who is forgiven, so as to remember the past sin. Margalit establishes the opposition between erasing (of writing, with an eraser) and crossing out or writing over (with a pen). Margalit and Hieronymi both aim to articulate a notion of forgiving that maintains and preserves the acknowledgment of a past wrong. Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, 197ff.

injury was wrong, that the tormenter should have acted differently, and that the victim ought not to have been treated in that way (548f., 552). This, I believe, matches the meaning of Améry's *ressentiments* exactly. If the Germans acknowledge the injuries inflicted on him without requesting the total forgetting of the injuries in return, his *ressentiments* would be satisfied.

Améry received such acknowledgment from one reader of "Ressentiments," Inge Werner. In her long correspondence with Améry she is full of self-doubt, and she is at pains to describe her relationship to her (Jewish) husband, whom she married only after the war. Her reflections prompt Améry to write:

Was Ihren Fall betrifft, möchte ich meinen, dass gerade Sie die „Zeitumkehrung“ (soferne [sic] der Begriff einen guten moralischen und geschichtlichen Sinn haben kann) bereits vollzogen, dass die Aktualisierung des Konflikts schon Wirklichkeit wurde. Sie haben ja, indem Sie sich ständig Ihrer Wurzeln, die Sie sich nun ja wahrhaftig nicht aussuchten, bewusst blieben und zugleich einen ganz neuen Platz in dieser Welt gewannen, ganz neue Einsichten fasten—Sie haben damit im eigentlichen Wortsinne „bewältigt,“ d.h.: sind Herr geworden Ihrer Vergangenheit und damit Ihrer Gegenwart. Jetzt wissen Sie, wohin Sie gehören, das ist schon alles. Der Rest wäre Literatur oder Psychologie. Die „Kehre“ ist vollzogen.¹²³

Werner has actualized the conflict and in acknowledging the crimes committed against Améry shares his desire for the reversibility of time. His human dignity is restored, the moral reversal of time completed.

The Objective Role of Victims' Ressentiments

A key term that Améry employs is "Selbstmisstrauen." His *ressentiments* are there to invite Germans to mistrust themselves and their national identity. In addition to the subjective demand to reverse time, *ressentiments* have the "objektive Aufgabe"

¹²³ Améry, letter to Inge Werner, Mai 18, 1967, in: Améry, *Briefe*, 219.

(141) to provoke a transformative actualization of the conflict “im Wirkungsfeld der geschichtlichen Praxis” (129). Améry means by this, in concrete terms, German historiography that engages the war generations as well as German youth. Their joint effort must effect the inclusion of the history of Nazism in German national historical consciousness. Therein lies the historical function of Améry’s *ressentiments* (and those of victims of the Holocaust): once the crimes of the Nazi past have entered national awareness *as morally true crimes* (rather than heroic deeds or inevitable byproducts of warfare), the absence of a German revolution against Hitler becomes superseded (141). Améry formulates the *objective* task of *ressentiments* in a passage worth quoting at length:

Gestachelt von den Sporen unseres Ressentiments allein—und nicht im mindesten durch eine subjektiv fast immer dubiose und objektiv geschichtsfeindliche Versöhnlichkeit—, würde das deutsche Volk dafür empfindlich bleiben, dass es ein Stück seiner nationalen Geschichte nicht von der Zeit neutralisieren lassen darf, sondern es zu integrieren hat. (...) Hält aber unser Ressentiment im Schweigen der Welt den Finger aufgerichtet, dann würde Deutschland vollumfänglich und auch in seinen künftigen Geschlechtern das Wissen bewahren, dass es nicht Deutsche waren, die die Herrschaft der Niedertracht beseitigten. Es würde dann, so hoffe ich manchmal, sein vergangenes Einverständnis mit dem Dritten Reich als die totale Verneinung nicht der mit Krieg und Tod bedrängten Welt, sondern auch des eigenen besseren Herkommens begreifen lernen, würde die zwölf Jahre, die für uns andere wirklich tausend waren, nicht mehr verdrängen, vertuschen, sondern als seine verwirklichte Welt und Selbstverneinung, als sein negatives Eigentum in Anspruch nehmen. Auf geschichtlichem Felde würde sich das ereignen, was ich vorhin schon hypothetisch für den engen individuellen Kreis beschrieb: Zwei Menschengruppen, Überwältiger und Überwältigte, würden einander begegnen am Treffpunkt des Wunsches nach Zeitumkehrung und damit nach Moralisierung der Geschichte. Die Forderung, erhoben vom deutschen, dem eigentlich rehabilitierten Volke, hätte ein ungeheures Gewicht, schwer genug, dass sie damit auch schon erfüllt wäre. Die deutsche Revolution wäre nachgeholt, Hitler zurückgenommen. (142f.)

The moral rejection of National Socialism necessitates that this past first become part of national consciousness, and here Améry outlines the task that he envisions for German youth. Améry grants youth their innocence but warns them not to call proudly on that innocence whenever faced with the past. He demands of them polemically that if they do not want to live “geschichtsfrei,” they should not recall Goethe without similarly invoking Himmler (140). He repeats: “Wiederholt sei: Zur deutschen Geschichte und Tradition gehören fürderhin auch Hitler und seine Taten” (141).¹²⁴ With national consciousness that includes not only a usable past but also the history of National Socialism, Améry argues, German youth would constantly practice mistrust vis-à-vis their own traditions and thus prevent future catastrophes.

Twenty years later, at the peak of the *Historikerstreit* that debated whether and how to integrate the Nazi past in national historical consciousness, Jürgen Habermas called for an “obligatory attitude of suspicion” among the Germans.¹²⁵ Taking Jaspers’ collective liability as a point of departure, Habermas argued that this liability carried over to future generations because “our form of life is connected” with those of previous and future generations through a web of traditions and a “historical milieu.”¹²⁶ Because this milieu has been “poisoned by unspeakable crimes” and now carries “the images of that unloading ramp at Auschwitz,” all Germans are bound by a shared, intersubjective liability for the victims. The liability entails in particular two distinct tasks: to maintain a relationship with Israel that is not normalized but manifests humility, and to keep alive the memory of the victims that must go beyond

¹²⁴ Améry (140f.) directly refers to Thomas Mann’s 1945 speech, “Deutschland und die Deutschen,” in which Mann rejected the—then—popular idea of two Germanys, one good/innocent, and one bad/guilty. Just as there were not two Germanys, Améry states that there are no two histories of Germany, one honorable to be told and one murderous to be forgotten. Cf. Mann, *Deutschland und die Deutschen*.

¹²⁵ Jürgen Habermas, “Historical Consciousness and Post-Traditional Identity. The Federal Republic’s Orientation to the West,” in *The New Conservatism. Cultural Criticism and the Historians’ Debate* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989), 249-68, here 250.

¹²⁶ Jürgen Habermas, “On the Public Use of History,” in *The New Conservatism. Cultural Criticism and the Historians’ Debate* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989), 229-40, here 233.

mere intellectual form.¹²⁷ Liability also implies a critical, rather than a nationalist evaluation of one's own traditions, and it is here that I find Habermas's concept of suspicion closely linked to Améry's of mistrust:

After Auschwitz our national self-consciousness can be derived only from the better traditions in our history, a history that is not unexamined but instead appropriated critically. The context of our national life, which once permitted incomparable injury to the substance of human solidarity, can be continued and further developed only in the light of the traditions that stand up to *the scrutiny of a gaze educated by the moral catastrophe, a gaze that is, in a word, suspicious*.¹²⁸

In the preface to the 1977 edition of *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*, Améry had made the same two demands Habermas formulated: observing a renewed wave of anti-Semitism, Améry urged German youth to protect democracy, first, by fending off the resurgence of anti-Semitism and securing a positive relationship with Israel, and second, by taking a critical stance vis-à-vis the German national past (15ff.).

In the 1980s, during the *Historikerstreit*, Habermas (whom Améry trusted to be an uncompromised leader of the youth¹²⁹) advocates a reflective, "scrutinizing attitude towards one's own identity-forming traditions" in opposition to conservative tendencies that aim at normalizing the Nazi past in order to create identity based on a usable (and revisionist) past. After Auschwitz—after shredding to pieces the "deep layer of solidarity among all who have a human face"—this is no longer acceptable.¹³⁰ Rather than affirming continuities that extend through the Nazi period, the task at hand must be explicitly problematizing "a past that we no longer shunt aside."¹³¹ The

¹²⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 229, 233.

¹²⁸ Emphasis mine. *Ibid.*, 234. The German original for "suspicious" is "argwöhnisch," Jürgen Habermas, "Vom öffentlichen Gebrauch der Historie," *Eine Art Schadensabwicklung* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1987), 137-44, here 142.

¹²⁹ Cf. Améry and Hermann, "Jean Améry im Gespräch," 59.

¹³⁰ Habermas, "Historical Consciousness," 251.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 266.

suspicious gaze cannot be trained in the environment of a purely conventional identity based on the particularism of a nation, and Habermas proposes the concept of a “post-traditional” (or post-conventional) identity based on universalist values such as democracy and human rights as a solution. In the forming of this “more sober political identity,” German youth play a crucial role.¹³²

From Améry’s conceptualization of the objective task of *ressentiments*—which is ultimately an enforcement of the liability that had been advocated twenty years prior by Jaspers, albeit with an emphasis on the social aspect of national liability, and again by Habermas twenty years later—it is obvious that Améry has no interest in revenge. He repeatedly says as much in *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*: “[E]s handelt sich, wenn ich mich recht erforscht habe, nicht um Rache” but “[u]m die Erlösung aus dem noch immer andauernden Verlassensein von damals” (131). By the actualization of the conflict he does not seek “die moralische Denkmöglichkeit” of vengeance (142). Ultimately, it is the desire for reconciliation that lies at the heart of Améry’s *ressentiments*. I agree with Horst Maier, who concludes his reading of “*Ressentiments*”: “Tief unter der harschen Schicht der Unversöhnlichkeit liegt eine erstaunliche Versöhnungsutopie.”¹³³ The therapeutic core that Heidelberger-Leonard sees in Améry’s *ressentiments* will not lead to closure, but it will open a space for dialogue.¹³⁴ After all, it had been his hope, as expressed in the original preface to *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*, that his *ressentiments* would motivate people to want to become *Mitmenschen* again (22).

¹³² Ibid., 256f.

¹³³ Horst Maier, “Hitler zurücknehmen. Zum antinazistischen Imperativ bei Jean Améry,” in *Ressentiments. Rede im Süddeutschen Rundfunk am 7. März 1966. Mit einem Essay von Horst Maier, EVA-Reden* (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1995), 47-87, here 65.

¹³⁴ Irene Heidelberger-Leonard, “Jean Amérys Selbstverständnis als Jude,” in *Über Jean Améry* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1990), 17-27, here 20.

The Reception of “Ressentiments”

In the essay’s final paragraph Améry returns to the term “Groll,” which he had used only once at the beginning. He now replaces it with the neologism “Nachträgerei,” thus arriving at a translation of *ressentiment* that implies the two meanings Améry has so carefully excavated: it denotes carrying the past into the present, to carry the past *beyond* its ending that is the present. It also means that something is carried after someone, i.e., *to*, someone. As a *Nachträger* Améry carries the injury of his past not only *into* the present but also *to* the Germans, so that they can relieve him of his burden. His *ressentiments* operate in an intersubjective dimension inasmuch as they require the attention of those to whom they are directed; they are a moral address that invites a response.

The response that came, however, was not the desired one. *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* received much positive attention by the German press, yet most reviewers shied away from discussing the “Ressentiments” essay. In many reviews only the four other essays are explicitly mentioned. This is especially noteworthy in the case of Horst Krüger’s review in *Die Zeit*. Améry and Krüger developed a long-lasting friendship after Krüger sent him *Das zerbrochene Haus*, which Améry believed to be the best personal reflection on the Nazi period penned by a German.¹³⁵ Krüger’s review is undoubtedly very positive, yet he too abstained from mentioning “Ressentiments,” despite admiring Améry for speaking up—“dieser einfachste und natürlichste Akt, [der] in unserem Land offenbar noch immer der schwierigste ist.”¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Krüger and Améry met in 1966, when Krüger invited Améry to write essays for the night program of *Südwestrundfunk* of which he was in charge, much like Heißenbüttel at SDR. Krüger, letter to Améry, January 27, 1966 (DLA 81.2052/1). In response to *Das zerbrochene Haus*, Améry acknowledges how different his experience was from Krüger’s, and yet how both men shared a common perspective despite their differences *because* they respected this difference. Améry, letter to Krüger, August 31, 1966 (DLA 81.1656/9). Their friendship becomes troubled when Krüger envies Améry his success and accuses him of not spending enough time in Germany to write about the country. Cf. correspondence in 1974, in particular: Krüger, letter to Améry, December 17, 1974 (DLA 81.2055/8).

¹³⁶ Horst Krüger, “Bericht vom beschädigten Leben. Jean Amérys Essayband *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*,” *Die Zeit*, September 23, 1966. The review is republished (with an incorrect publication date):

Other reviews are full of misrepresentations: Heinz Abosch misquotes “die Erinnerung” instead of *ressentiments* as the “Emotionsquelle jeder echten Moral”; O. E. H. Becker speaks of Améry’s love of and trust in the Germans; and one newspaper mistypes the reviewer’s headline as “Bewältigte Vergangenheit.”¹³⁷ Only two reviews are the exception: a review in *Spiegel* focuses exclusively on “Ressentiments,” vaguely calling *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* the “anti-anti-Semitism of a non-non-Jew,” without drawing any concrete conclusions for Germans, as if *ressentiments* were Améry’s private matter.¹³⁸ The more exceptional is Hans Schwab-Felisch’s *Merkur* review, in which the author recommends “Ressentiments” as a text of greatest relevance for “uns Deutsche” and “jeden nicht-jüdischen Leser.” According to Schwab-Felisch, Améry effectively ended the postwar silence, and “[w]ir müssen diesen neuen Ton zur Kenntnis nehmen.”¹³⁹ Alfred Andersch was among those who did so—but did he listen carefully?¹⁴⁰

Horst Krüger, “Bericht vom beschädigten Leben,” in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 9, Materialien*, ed. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2008), 161-66, here 162. Krüger’s print review is an expanded version of a letter Krüger sent Améry as his first reaction to reading *Jenseits*. Cf. Krüger, letter to Améry, September 2, 1966 (DLA 81.2056/6).

¹³⁷ All cited reviews are part of the Améry *Nachlass* at “Dokumentationsstelle Zeitungsausschnittsammlung: Material aus dem Nachlass” at DLA. Maria Améry annotated the reviews, but did not always give complete bibliographic references: Heinz Abosch, “Moral der Erinnerung,” *Stimme*, September 1968; O. E. H. Becker, “Die Mission der Voreingenommenheit,” *Der Tagesspiegel*, September 23, 1966. The source of the article “Überwältigte Vergangenheit” is unknown, however, a note sent by the publisher to Améry reports that the headline was a “Satzfehler”; the original review was “Unbewältigte Vergangenheit.”

¹³⁸ Author unknown. Only the title relates Améry’s essay to the Germans: “Stachel der Deutschen,” *Der Spiegel*, no. 32 (1966), 67.

¹³⁹ Hans Schwab-Felisch, “Die Probe auf das Individuum,” *Merkur* (November 1966), 1098-1100. Améry wrote to Hans Paschke, editor of *Merkur*, that Schwab-Felisch was one of the very few readers who had properly understood the text. Cf. Améry, letter to Paschke, November 21, 1966, in: Améry, *Briefe*, 195. Additionally Hilde Rubinstein wrote a very engaged review in which she reflects on Améry’s *ressentiments*, but ultimately she rejected them, Hilde Rubinstein, “Bewältigungen des Übermächtigen,” *Kürbiskern*, no. 1 (1967), 150-59.

¹⁴⁰ I chose to discuss Andersch’s literary engagement with Améry over Ingeborg Bachmann’s because of the former’s involvement in the formation of the *Literaturbetrieb* as social conscience of West Germany, cf. ch. I. Heidelberger-Leonard has written on Bachmann’s engagement with Améry, cf. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard, “Ingeborg Bachmann und Jean Améry. Zur Differenz zwischen der Ästhetisierung des Leidens und der Authentizität traumatischer Erfahrung,” in *Jean Améry im Dialog mit der zeitgenössischen Literatur. Essays*, ed. Hans Höller (Stuttgart: Hans-Dieter Heinz/Akademischer Verlag Stuttgart, 2002), 103-16; Irene Heidelberger-Leonard, “Versuchte Nähe.

On the occasion of Améry's sixty-fifth birthday in 1977, Andersch wrote a *Festschrift* in his honor. Reviewing Améry's life and work in rather great detail, Andersch failed to mention Améry's position vis-à-vis West Germany that figures so prominently not only in *Jenseits* but in most of Améry's texts.¹⁴¹ Indeed, Andersch's sole acknowledgment of Améry's past as a victim of National Socialism came in an "Adnote" that served to advertise his own book:

Nicht behandelt in dieser Rezension wird der jüdische Aspekt von Amérys Existenz, obwohl Améry ihn deutlich zur Debatte stellt und ihm in "Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne" ein eigenes Kapitel eingeräumt hat. Ich habe dem Thema des deutsch-jüdischen Intellektuellen einen Roman gewidmet, "Efraim," und den Umstand, dass Romane in der heute zwischen den Hauptideologien geführten geisteswissenschaftlichen Debatte als nichtexistent betrachtet werden, kann ich nicht berücksichtigen. Ich verweise also, was meine Differenzen und meine Übereinstimmungen mit Améry hinsichtlich des "Zwanges und der Unmöglichkeit, Jude zu sein" betrifft, auf "Efraim."
(289)

If *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* inspired Andersch to write a book, presumably Andersch accepted Améry's invitation to a mistrustful and suspicious stance regarding his own past; in this light *Efraim* deserves a closer (if brief) look.

Efraim tells the story of a Jewish-German emigrant who returns to postwar Berlin on behalf of his London boss, Keir Horne, to look for Horne's illegitimate Jewish daughter Esther, whom Horne had not tried to rescue from Nazi Germany.¹⁴² With Andersch's biography in mind, Sebald concludes that in the character of Horne

Ingeborg Bachmann und Jean Améry," in *Jean Améry im Dialog mit der zeitgenössischen Literatur. Essays*, ed. Hans Höller (Stuttgart: Hans-Dieter Heinz/Akademischer Verlag Stuttgart, 2002), 117-28. For a more general comparison of Bachmann and Améry, cf. Karl Bartsch, "Grenzverletzungen des Ichs. Ingeborg Bachmanns späte Prosa und Jean Amérys 'Bewältigungsversuche'," *Literatur und Kritik* 229-230 (1988), 404-14.

¹⁴¹ The only exception is a short excursus on Améry's interpretation of current German intellectual movements (esp. Adorno), cf. Alfred Andersch, "Anzeige einer Rückkehr des Geistes als Person," in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 9, Materialien*, ed. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2008), 269-90, here 284f.

¹⁴² Alfred Andersch, *Efraim* (Stuttgart, Hamburg: Deutscher Bücherbund, 1967). From now on page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

Andersch touches on the “trauma of his own moral failure.” As Sebald reports, Andersch divorced his Jewish wife and left her and their daughter in grave danger in order to gain admission to the *Reichsschrifttumskammer*, but he conveniently reclaimed his Jewish family when this was useful in seeking leniency at POW camps.¹⁴³ Yet Andersch identifies not with Horne but with the Jewish character George Efraim. As the narrative strand of the search for Esther becomes secondary in the novel, Efraim’s reflections on the period of National Socialism and his escape from the Nazis come to the fore. If Andersch took *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* as model for *Efraim*, he did so only to depart from it: “Juden, memoriere ich einen Augenblick, deutsche Juden, jüdische Deutsche, Deutsche, aber das in der Wortkombination verborgene Problem interessiert mich nicht weiter; es ist überholt” (153f.). Although Efraim acknowledges that there is a problem—the one Améry wants to actualize—author Andersch dismisses it in one concluding phrase.

Andersch’s dismissal is based on his interpretation of the past as chance and not causality. He has Efraim say: “Es ist ein purer Zufall, dass vor zwanzig Jahren jüdische Familien ausgerottet wurden, und nicht ganze Familien zwanzig Jahre früher oder später. (...) Leute, die Erklärungen dafür bereit haben, sind mir höchst verdächtig” (50). Stephan Braese detects in *Efraim* a passage that Andersch took verbatim from a witness at the Auschwitz Trial. Because Andersch juxtaposes the quotation with Efraim’s accusation of the dubiousness of all explanations of the Holocaust that link it to a “Wirkung eines Willens” (229), Braese concludes that Andersch fundamentally undermined the witness, who had testified precisely in order to decide upon guilt and to reject the notion of chance.¹⁴⁴ Ruth Klüger, in a similarly critical assessment of *Efraim*, argues that Andersch deliberately used the Jewish

¹⁴³ W. G. Sebald, “Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea. On Alfred Andersch,” in *On the Natural History of Destruction* (New York: Random House, 2003), 105–42, here 135, 117–121.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Braese, “Frankfurter Auschwitz-Prozess,” 236.

perspective in order to claim the victim's authority "für die Feststellung, dass es keine feststellbare Ursache für die Shoah gebe."¹⁴⁵ This conclusion echoes a German sentiment of the time; it is certainly not the critical engagement with the past Améry had demanded.¹⁴⁶ The reception of *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*, as exemplified by Andersch, ignored the active, self-reflective role Améry wanted his readership to assume. Instead, *Jenseits* was absorbed in the common practice of the *Literaturbetrieb* to interpret Jewish commentary selectively and to ignore specifically Jewish perspectives.

The Trading of Blows

Améry's resentiments grew stronger over the years because they reached only a few Germans. Although he had written Heißenbüttel at the conclusion of their joint *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* project that he had enough of Auschwitz and wanted to write "weder von Nazis noch von Juden" ever again, he kept returning to the topic, which "sich (...) aufdrängte" everywhere, even when that meant that he would

¹⁴⁵ Ruth Klüger, "Zeugensprache: Koeppen und Andersch," in *Bestandsaufnahme. Studien zur Gruppe 47*, ed. Stephan Braese (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1999), 173-81, here 179.

¹⁴⁶ It is therefore surprising and, frankly, quite puzzling that Améry wrote a very positive review of *Efraim* in which he called Andersch a victim of Hitler! Jean Améry, "Efraim--oder die kluge Skepsis," in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 5, Aufsätze zur Literatur und zum Film*, ed. Hans Höller (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2003), 151-57, here 152. One explanation could be that Améry somehow felt indebted to Andersch: just three months before, in response to reading *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*, Andersch had written Améry a long and personal letter in which he called *Jenseits* "eines der Grunddokumente unserer Zeit" and Améry's appropriation of National Socialism (in the "Tortur" essay) the "klarste(n) Definition dieses Tatbestandes." (Although Andersch discusses each of the essays individually, he notably mentions "Ressentiments" in a single sentence: "Auch das Kapitel über die konstituierende Rolle des Ressentiments ist einleuchtend, hebe diesen Begriff in eine neue Dimension." Améry marked this passage of Andersch's letter for emphasis.) Andersch, letter to Améry, July 24, 1967 (DLA 81.1785a/1). A second explanation could be that Améry pitied Andersch: In light of the predominantly critical reviews *Efraim* received, Améry expressed in a letter to a friend how hurtful it is to receive that kind of rejection for one's creative work. Cf. his letter to Ernst Mayer, November 9, 1967 (DLA 86.746/9). Only in 1973 did Améry distance himself suddenly and with finality from Andersch, after the latter had celebrated Ernst Jünger publicly at the occasion of Jünger's birthday, cf. Améry, letter to Andersch, June 21, 1973, in Améry, *Briefe*, 426-430.

become Germany's "Berufsjude(n), beziehungsweise Berufs-KZler."¹⁴⁷ He kept rebelling

gegen meine Vergangenheit, gegen die Geschichte, gegen eine Gegenwart, die das Unbegreifliche geschichtlich einfrieren lässt und es damit auf empörende Weise verfälscht. Nichts ist vernarbt, und was vielleicht 1964 [=bei Niederschreibung von *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*] schon im Begriffe stand zu heilen, das bricht als infizierte Wunde wieder auf. Emotionen? Meinetwegen. Wo steht geschrieben, dass Aufklärung emotionslos zu sein hat? Aufklärung kann ihrer Aufgabe nur dann gerecht werden, wenn sie sich mit Leidenschaft ans Werk macht.¹⁴⁸

Améry took every possible opportunity to intervene passionately in the German public sphere. He openly challenged former SS-member Hans Egon Holthusen and Hitler's favorite minister Albert Speer; he harshly criticized Sebastian Haffner; he condemned the rise of new anti-Semitism; and he sounded the alarm to the failings of the Left. Yet all this seemed to matter too little, even when he reached a large audience via print media, the radio and, increasingly, television. One of the farthest reaching consequences of his activism came about in 1974, when the Federal Court of Justice opened preliminary proceedings against him for suspicion of supporting the RAF.¹⁴⁹ While Améry never approved of terrorism and therefore even decidedly distanced himself from his intellectual role model Sartre, for a short period Améry entertained an uncertain affiliation with philosophies of violence. Because Primo Levi is often invoked as the supposedly forgiving counterpoint to Améry, the next section concerns Levi's intellectual affinity with Améry as well as Améry's flirtation with violence.

¹⁴⁷ Améry, letters to Heißenbüttel, March 4 and May 17, 1966, in Améry, *Briefe*, 165, 177.

¹⁴⁸ Améry, *Jenseits*, 18f.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Stephan Steiner, "In Extremis. Gewalt und Gegen-Gewalt im Werk von Jean Améry," in *Jean Améry (Hans Maier)*, ed. Stephan Steiner (Basel, Frankfurt/M.: Stroemfeld/Nexus, 1996), 99-110, here 106. Améry never supported the RAF; the 1974 proceedings were based on a misinterpretation of Améry's comment regarding hunger strikes of RAF terrorists in Stammheim prison: he supported hunger strikes, not the RAF.

“Im Gegensatz zu Primo Levi bin ich kein Verzeiher,” Améry wrote in 1967 to Hety Schmitt-Maass, who had just returned from a meeting with Levi, whom she described to Améry as “frei von Ressentiments (...) und völlig über den Dingen stehend.”¹⁵⁰ Schmitt-Maass was then the press officer at the Hessian ministry of education, and she had first contacted Améry the previous year to tell him of her efforts to introduce *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* (as well as Primo Levi’s *Survival in Auschwitz*, translated into German in 1961) as mandatory reading in all Hessian schools.¹⁵¹ Schmitt-Maass’s interest in Nazi camps went beyond reviewing literature for the ministry, and she corresponded with several camp survivors, among them Hermann Langbein, Primo Levi, and Jean Améry, with all of whom she developed long-lasting epistolary friendships.¹⁵² She had a habit of sending photocopies of letters from third parties to her immediate correspondents; by this means Levi learned of Améry’s unfavorable comparison. He responded many years later in his 1986 book *The Drowned and the Saved*, saying that he was not, as “Améry called me[,] ‘the forgiver.’ (...) I am not inclined to forgive, I never forgave our enemies of that time (...) because I know no human act that can erase a crime; I demand justice, but I am not able, personally, to trade punches or return blows.”¹⁵³ He rejected Améry’s *ressentiments*, which he considered to be a “*Zurückschlagen* or ‘returning the blow’ morality.”¹⁵⁴ Nevertheless, it has been suggested that Levi, too, articulated *ressentiments* that were not unlike Améry’s.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ Améry, letter to Hety Schmitt-Maass, September 28, 1967, in: Améry, *Briefe*, 248. Schmitt-Maass, letter to Améry, September 10, 1967 (DLA 86.984/16).

¹⁵¹ Cf. Schmitt-Maass, letter to Améry, November 29, 1966 (DLA 86.984/1).

¹⁵² She also instructed her daughter, who worked as a librarian at Harvard, to order *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* for the library collection, among other German publications on the camp experience she considered “Pflichtlektüre.” Schmitt-Maass, letter to Améry, February 28, 1967 (DLA 86.984/2).

¹⁵³ Levi, *Drowned*, 137. The sixth chapter, “The Intellectual in Auschwitz,” is essentially Levi’s answer to Améry’s essay “An den Grenzen des Geistes,” included in *Jenseits*.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Cynthia Ozick, “Primo Levi’s Suicide Note,” in *Metaphor and Memory* (New York Knopf, 1989), 34-48.

The intellectual battle between Levi and Améry is relatively well documented.¹⁵⁶ In contrast to his earlier autobiographical writings, *The Drowned and the Saved* was a collection of essays that were both autobiographical and analytical and, in the judgment of Enzo Traverso, they stylistically resembled Améry's *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*.¹⁵⁷ One chapter, "The Intellectual in Auschwitz," is dedicated entirely to Améry's essay on the intellectual (from *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*).

Levi opens his critique of Améry's essay ("his bitter, gelid essay") with the admission that "to polemicize with a dead man is embarrassing and not very royal," in particular when the one absent was a "potential friend and most valuable interlocutor" whose work Levi regretted not having translated into Italian.¹⁵⁸ He lists as the most important difference between himself and his "companion and antagonist" Améry (142) not the loss of *Heimat* but Levi's inability "'to return the blow.'" Quoting Améry's description of an event in the camps where Améry had defended himself with physical force,¹⁵⁹ Levi comments: "'Trading punches' is an experience I do not have, as far back as I can go in memory; nor can I say I regret not having it." (136). This is not entirely true; immediately following this assertion he recounts an instance where he, like Améry, "tried to defend myself" against physical abuse by another inmate, "and [I] landed him a kick on the shin with my wooden clog." However, Levi decided that rather than trading blows he would "delegate punishments, revenges, and

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Sebald, "Jean Améry und Primo Levi"; Karin Lorenz-Lindemann, "Wieviel Heimat braucht der Mensch? Aspects of Jewish Self-Determination in the Works of Jean Améry and Primo Levi," in *The Jewish Self-Portrait in European and American Literature*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Schrader et al., *Conditio Judaica. Studien und Quellen zur deutsch-jüdischen Literatur- und Kulturgeschichte* (Tübingen, Germany: Niemeyer, 1996), 223-30; ch. 3, "The Victim's Resentment," in: Wood, *Vectors of Memory*; cf. ch. "Als Intellektuelle in Auschwitz: Jean Améry und Primo Levi," in: Enzo Traverso, *Auschwitz denken. Die Intellektuellen und die Shoah*, trans. Helmut Dahmer (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2000); Arne Johan Vetlesen, "A Case for Resentment. Jean Améry versus Primo Levi," *Journal of Human Rights* 5 (2006), 27-44; cf. ch. 8, "The Passion of Reason: Reflections on Primo Levi and Jean Améry," in: Goodheart, *The Reign of Ideology*.

¹⁵⁷ Traverso, *Auschwitz denken*, 253f.

¹⁵⁸ Levi, *Drowned*, 130, 127. From now on page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Améry, *Jenseits*, 162.

retaliations to the laws of my country” (137). Levi interprets the “anguish-filled essay” (138) on *ressentiments* as Améry’s morality of trading punches, and he views Améry’s insistence on this morality as a possible key to understanding his suicide:

I admire it, but I must point out that this choice, protracted throughout his post-Auschwitz existence, led him to positions of such severity and intransigence as to make him incapable of finding joy in life, indeed of living. Those who “trade blows” with the entire world achieve dignity but pay a very high price for it because they are sure to be defeated. Améry’s suicide, which took place in Salzburg in 1978, like other suicides admits of a cloud of explanations, but, in hindsight, that episode of defying the Pole offers one interpretation. (136)

In the final chapter of *The Drowned and the Saved*, Levi resorts to language that, according to Cynthia Ozick, attests to Levi’s own *ressentiments*, and which, if *ressentiments* are a key to understanding suicide, explains Levi’s own death.¹⁶⁰ In the chapter “Letters from Germans,” Levi recollects the genesis of *Survival in Auschwitz* and reflects on his reaction to the news that the book would be translated into German, which he describes as “the violent and new emotion of having won a battle” (168). Only then did he realize that the book had not Italians but Germans as its audience: “its true recipients, those against whom the book was aimed like a gun[,] were they, the Germans. Now the gun was loaded. (...) The hour had come to settle accounts, to put the cards on the table” (168). Reading “Letters from Germans,” Ozick concludes that the text is “the record of a man returning blows with all the might of the human fury, in full knowledge that the pen is mightier than the fist,” and that Levi’s “rage” and “deadly anger” drove him into suicide.¹⁶¹

This may be too strong an inference, though Levi certainly uses the gun metaphor to imagine corralling Germans and forcing them to confront the moral truth of the crimes they committed against him. In a way, he is “actualizing the conflict.”

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Ozick, “Primo Levi’s Suicide Note,” qtd. in: Wood, *Vectors of Memory*, 66f.

¹⁶¹ Qtd. in: Wood, *Vectors of Memory*, 66.

Levi is articulating *ressentiment* not unlike Améry's, and he directs it against the Germans collectively. He quotes from letters he received from German readers in response to *Survival in Auschwitz*, and while he notes that those forty Germans were hardly representative of all Germans, he recognizes within this small sample repeated attempts to defend the presumed innocence of the majority of the people. Like Améry, Levi calls the notion of collective guilt misguided, yet he insists on a collective liability by reminding his readers that "*Deutschum*," as the sum of "traditions, customs, history, language, and culture," must include from now on a consciousness of the Nazi crimes committed in the name of the German people (183f.).

Let me return to the episode in which Améry traded blows with the Polish foreman who had treated all Jewish inmates in Auschwitz with extreme brutality. In the final essay of *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*, Améry reflects on the impossibility and the necessity of being a Jew: because he lacked any cultural or religious association with Judaism, it was impossible for him to be Jewish, and yet the Nuremberg laws *made* him a prosecuted Jew, a fate from which there was no escape:

Jude sein, das hieß für mich von diesem Anfang an, ein Toter auf Urlaub zu sein, ein zu Ermordender, der nur durch Zufall noch nicht dort war, wohin er rechtens gehörte, und dabei ist es in vielen Varianten, in manchen Intensitätsgraden bis heute geblieben. In der Todesdrohung, die ich zum ersten Mal in voller Deutlichkeit beim Lesen der Nürnberger Gesetze verspürte, lag auch dar, was man gemeinhin die methodische „Entwürdigung“ der Juden durch die Nazis nennt. Anders formuliert: der Würdeentzug drückte die Morddrohung aus. (154f.)

This societal process of taking away his dignity paralleled "auf unserer, meiner Seite ein symmetrischer Prozess um Wiedergewinn der Würde. Er ist bis heute für mich nicht abgeschlossen" (158). The repossession of dignity depends largely on the individual's revolt against the degrading experience; as example, Améry retells the story of the Polish foreman who, by abusing him physically, impugned his dignity:

Ich schlug in offener Revolte den Vorarbeiter Juszek meinerseits ins Gesicht: meine Würde saß als Faustschlag an seinem Kiefer—und dass dann am Ende ich, der körperlich viel Schwächere, es war, der unterlag und heillose Prügel bekam, hatte keine Bedeutung mehr. (...) Mein Körper, wenn er sich zum Hieb anspannte, war meine physisch-metaphysische Würde. (...) Ich war ich als Schlag—für mich selbst und für den Gegner. (162).

In that instance Améry reclaimed his dignity by responding to violence with violence, and he sees in the reaffirmation of dignity the moral value of such immediate, reactive violence better described as self-defense than revenge.

Once Améry read Frantz Fanon's highly influential *The Wretched of the Earth*, his writings on violence began to include justifications of physical revenge.¹⁶² Fanon defended what he called redemptive or revolutionary violence as an inherent part of decolonization, and in the original and highly controversial preface, Sartre applauded (and perhaps misrepresented) Fanon's promotion of violence.¹⁶³ In a review of Jean-François Steiner's *Treblinka* Améry expresses great admiration for those camp prisoners who, in spite of no chance of success, revolted against their oppressors; he writes, in reference to Fanon, that violence might be redemptive in those cases, "vorher der Mensch nichts als erleidenes Objekt des geschichtlichen Ereignisses war."¹⁶⁴ By revolting, the Treblinka Jews morally transcended the limitations of their

¹⁶² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (Grove Press, 2004).

¹⁶³ For a recent study on the rhetoric of political violence in postwar France, with an emphasis on revolutionary violence and Jean-Paul Sartre, cf. Emma Kathryn Kuby, "Between Humanism and Terror. The Problem of Political Violence in Postwar France, 1944-1962," Diss. (Cornell University, 2011).

¹⁶⁴ Jean Améry, "...wie eine Herde von Schafen?" in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 7, Aufsätze zur Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, ed. Stephan Steiner (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2005), 403-12, here 408f. In a different review of *Treblinka* for *Der Spiegel*, Améry repeats his thesis: "Ich kann nur aus eigener Erfahrung bestätigen, dass für die jüdischen Lagerhäftlinge (...) jede Nachricht über einen gewaltsamen Widerstand von Juden (...) durchaus und deutlich redemptorischen Charakter hatte." The title of the review was probably chosen by his editors, not Améry himself, Jean Améry, "Erlösung in der Revolte," in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 7, Aufsätze zur Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, ed. Stephan Steiner (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2005), 413-21, here 416f. Cf. Jean-François Steiner, *Treblinka. Die Revolte eines Vernichtungslagers* (Oldenburg, Hamburg: Stalling, 1966).

physical weakness. It is important to note that Améry still limits the justification of violence to extreme events and did not favor violence in general.

A few years later, in a radio essay on Fanon, Améry expressly distances himself from George Sorel, whose Nietzsche-inspired *Reflections on Violence* made an unrestricted apology for violence by celebrating it as a transformative force of modern society.¹⁶⁵ Unlike Sorel, however, Fanon's justification of violence was based on the experience of oppression, which Améry believes he shared.¹⁶⁶ He now fully accepts Fanon's notion of redemptive violence. In unconditional agreement with Sartre, Améry views "rächende Gewalt, im Widerspruch zur unterdrückenden" as "eminent *human*."¹⁶⁷ He writes,

Es wird (...) im Akt der Gewalt, die der Physik als irreversible erscheinende Zeit im Felde des Phänomenalen umgekehrt. Die erlittene Gewalt wird ungeschehen gemacht. Der Unterdrücker, hineingerissen durch die vom rächenden Unterdrückten ihm zugefügte Gewalt, wird Menschenbruder. Weißt du, wie das ist, wenn man das Eisen des Gewehrlaufs kalt an der warmen Haut spürt? Du weißt es jetzt. Du bist wie ich, der es zu spüren bekam. So wirst du im Augenblick, wo ich aus dem Gewalterleider zum Gewaltbringer werde, mein Mitmensch. (442)

In yet another text, on the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, Améry describes the revolt as an absurd yet morally justified "Realisation *humaner Rache*" by which its participants found "ihre Eigentlichkeit."¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Sorel embeds in violence a regenerative force towards returning to a heroic civilization unrestricted by modern values currently upheld by the bourgeoisie, and thus violence itself becomes a sacrosanct end in itself. Cf. Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, ed. Jeremy Jennings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). For a brief discussion of quasi-sacred violence, cf. the epilogue in LaCapra, *History in Transit*, 262-266.

¹⁶⁶ Améry dismissed Sorel mainly because Sorel's notion of violence lacked any experiential basis, cf. Jean Améry, "Die Geburt des Menschen aus dem Geiste der Gewalt. Der Revolutionär Frantz Fanon," in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 7, Aufsätze zur Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, ed. Stephan Steiner (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2005), 428-49, here 437.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 441.

¹⁶⁸ Jean Améry, "Im Wartezimmer des Todes," in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 7, Aufsätze zur Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, ed. Stephan Steiner (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2005), 450-74.

How do we explain this development in Améry's thought from rejecting revenge to celebrating it? There is no single answer to this. Reading Fanon obviously challenged Améry's position on violence, but whether Fanon provoked a genuine change of attitude or a mere inconsistency in Améry's thought is unclear. In the Warsaw Ghetto essay Améry himself offers a justification for his radical call for revenge, which originates in the Nazi establishment of the "Gegen-Welt" of the camps. This counter-world confronted its imprisoned inhabitants with the paradox welcoming "das augenscheinlich Böse (die Rache) [sic]" if one would "überhaupt Moral wiederherstellen" (469). By this argument, revenge is only apparently evil; in the context of a hostile world, it has a life-affirming quality that speaks to the adherence to moral values. In the counter-world created by the Nazis, who found *their* "Eigentlichkeit" in torture (as Améry argued in "Tortur"), the victims had to resort to revenge to adjust to this perverted moral reality.¹⁶⁹

Stephan Steiner suggests that it was Améry's recognition that he, unlike prisoners in Treblinka and Warsaw, never attempted to fight his Nazi oppressors, and in the "Schock der versäumten Gegen-Gewalt," Améry supported Fanon as a means of "making up."¹⁷⁰ This interpretation is founded upon Améry's regret, voiced in the Fanon essay, never to have carried a gun.¹⁷¹ While Steiner offers an insightful reading of Améry's violence-related texts, I think one must also consider the time during which Améry wrote of revenge in order to understand his flirtation with violence.

Améry wrote the few essays that clearly defend vengeful, or redemptive, violence in 1968 and 1969, a time during which he witnessed renewed anti-Semitism in the form of anti-Zionism espoused by the new Left. After Israel's defeat of the Arab forces in the Six-Day War in 1967, the image of the Jew as "herrischer Sieger, als

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Améry, *Jenseits*, 77f.

¹⁷⁰ Steiner, "In Extremis," 101.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Améry, "Geburt des Menschen," 441.

Besitzer” quickly replaced that of the Auschwitz victim in Germany (which had never been fully embraced), and suddenly anti-Semitism appeared to Améry as “wiederum ehrbar.”¹⁷² Although Améry has no personal relationship to Israel, as a Jew “im Sinne des Reichsbürgergesetzes vom 15. September 1935”—that is, as Jew in the eye of the anti-Semite—he views his alliance with Israel as “eine Sache der Existenz.”¹⁷³

According to Améry as long as Jews remain a target of aggression, the Left, bound by tradition to answer for the oppressed, ought to ally with them. Since the new Left rejects Israel in ignorance of the Nazi past (which it deemed history and done with) and under the pretext of anti-imperialism, every Jew in the world “[ist] noch schlechter dran (...) als Franz Fanons Kolonialisierte(r).”¹⁷⁴ Out of this understanding Améry developed his intellectual affinity with proponents of violence—an affinity that lasted only briefly.

By 1970, the terrorist activities of the RAF prompted Améry to distance himself decisively from philosophers of violence, who had (intentionally or not) lent terror organizations and their urban guerilla warfare an abstract justification that erroneously blurred the differences “zwischen Rio de Janeiro oder Montevideo und Paris oder Frankfurt.”¹⁷⁵ Shortly before his death, in his intellectual self-portrait “Revision in Permanenz,” Améry revised “ohne Zaudern” his theoretical deliberations on violence because violence had become an abstract apology for real aggression.

¹⁷² Jean Améry, “Der ehrbare Antisemitismus,” in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 7, Aufsätze zur Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, ed. Stephan Steiner (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2005), 131-40, here 133. Cf. Jean Améry, “Die Linke und der 'Zionismus',” in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 7, Aufsätze zur Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, ed. Stephan Steiner (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2005), 141-50.

¹⁷³ Améry, “Der ehrbare Antisemitismus,” 134f.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁷⁵ Jean Améry, “Grenzen politischer Gewaltphilosophie,” in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 7, Aufsätze zur Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, ed. Stephan Steiner (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2005), 475-480, here 478. As terrorist violence increased, Améry critically reflected on his own role in advocating violence and therefore promoting terror. He probably overestimated his influence when he pronounced himself guilty. Cf. Jean Améry, “Wir Helfershelfer. Zur Frage von Theorie und Praxis,” in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 7, Aufsätze zur Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, ed. Stephan Steiner (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2005), 378-86.

Theoretically, Améry mused, violent reactions to radical evil are of moral value, in practice, however, violence was inhumane in every instance.¹⁷⁶

Although Améry dropped the issue of violence (except to revise his earlier position), he remained a very careful observer of the developments of the new Left vis-à-vis Israel, and he distinguished himself as the first commentator on a particular kind of Left anti-Semitism.¹⁷⁷

Resigning from Ressentiments

Améry began the “Ressentiments” essay with impressions from his travels through West Germany, a country described as blooming (“blüht”) with people whose efficiency stood in surprising contrast to their “träumerischem Geschichtsbewußtsein” (118). He then explained his ressentiments to the Germans in order to provoke their self-mistrust vis-à-vis their past, so that they would correct their sense of history and thereby work through the past together with victims to reach the moral reversal of time that would undo Hitler. In the closing section of his essay, however, Améry was very pessimistic that his labor would bear fruit. The dreamy historical awareness of Germany might not be counteracted by victims’ *ressentiments*; this sequence, he stated, might be nothing but “moralische(e) Träumerei” (144).

¹⁷⁶ Jean Améry, “Revision in Permanenz. Selbstanzeige im Zweifel,” in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 7, Aufsätze zur Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, ed. Stephan Steiner (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2005), 568-72, here 569f.

¹⁷⁷ Vol. 7 of the *Werke* edition includes the seven most important of Améry’s essays regarding left anti-Semitism, including the much revised and expanded 1976 version of “Der ehrbare Antisemitismus,” in which Améry argues more substantively for the Left’s duty to defend Israel. Cf. the works of today’s prominent commentator on German-Israeli relations, Henryk M. Broder, *Der ewige Antisemit. Über Sinn und Funktion eines geständigen Gefühls* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986); Henryk M. Broder, “Ein glaubensloser Jude. Anlaß des 15. Jahrestags des Kritikers und Essayisten Jean Améry. Eine Erinnerung an seine Kritik des linken Antizionismus,” *Die Tageszeitung*, October 16, 1993. Broder asked Améry to write the preface to his 1978 *Deutschland erwacht*, a documentary of German neo-Nazism; however, Améry pulled back his contribution. Cf. Broder, letters to Améry, April 3 and May 26, 1978 (DLA 81.1857/1 and /3).

In the year of his death, Améry conceded that he had been speaking in the wind, hence the title of the essay “In den Wind gesprochen.”¹⁷⁸ With great resignation, he no longer mentioned *ressentiments*, which had been replaced with “ohnmächtige[m] Zorn” (573). History overlooked Améry’s “essayistische(n) Ausschweifungen” (583), which, in his view, did nothing to educate those he addressed (594); hence he left the “geduldige(r) Aufklärungsarbeit” to others (599). Mastering the past was no longer his “‘deutsch-jüdisches’ Problem” but a “Konfliktstoff zwischen dem deutschen Volk und seiner Jüngstgeschichte. (...) Aber das alles ist, wie gesagt, nicht Sache der Juden, sondern der Deutschen. Die Juden können dem deutschen Volke dabei nicht helfen, selbst dann nicht, wenn sie es leidenschaftlich zu tun wünschten.”¹⁷⁹ No matter how strong the voices of Jewish victims might be, their words alone could not reverse time so long as they fell on deaf ears.

¹⁷⁸ Jean Améry, “In den Wind gesprochen,” in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 7, Aufsätze zur Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, ed. Stephan Steiner (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2005), 573-600.

¹⁷⁹ Jean Améry, “Nachwort zur fünften Session des Jüdischen Weltkongresses,” in *Deutsche und Juden, ein unlösbares Problem. Reden zum Jüdischen Weltkongress 1966*, ed. Abraham Melzer (n.p.: Verlag Kontakte, 1966), 103-07, 106f.

CHAPTER V

“Es gab seither keine Jasage mehr”¹: Jean Améry’s *Lefeu oder Der Abbruch*

In her attempt to establish Améry as a novelist (rather than essayist), Irene Heidelberger-Leonard has called it a tragic misunderstanding that Améry’s book *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* and the essay collections that followed were considered the “essayistische(n) Höhepunkt des Nachkriegs,” when for Améry they meant little more than a stepping stone towards a career as a literary writer.² It is questionable whether Améry was ever acclaimed as the foremost essayist of postwar Germany or if he did in fact prefer literary over essayistic writing.³ However, it is indisputable that once Améry achieved considerable public recognition as an essayist, he sought to become a storyteller as well: “Ich wollte erzählen oder: *auch* erzählen.”⁴

Remembering his early attempts at writing prose, Améry wanted to return to these beginnings. He began working on a hybrid form of narrative and essay, a project that resulted in the publication of the “*Roman-Essay* oder *Essay-Roman*” *Lefeu oder Der*

¹ Jean Améry, *Lefeu oder Der Abbruch*, in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 1, Die Schiffbrüchigen, Lefeu oder Der Abbruch*, ed. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2007), 287-507, here 498.

² Irene Heidelberger-Leonard, “Nachwort [zu *Lefeu*],” in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 1, Die Schiffbrüchigen, Lefeu oder Der Abbruch*, ed. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2007), 668-700, here 668. Améry cemented his success as essayist with the publications *Über das Altern* (1968) and *Unmeisterliche Wanderjahre* (1971), two works which, along with *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*, Améry considered his autobiographical trilogy. Jean Améry, *Über das Altern*, in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 3, Über das Altern, Hand an sich legen*, ed. Monique Boussart, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2005), 173-344; Jean Améry, *Unmeisterliche Wanderjahre*, in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 2, Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne, Unmeisterliche Wanderjahre, Örtlichkeiten*, ed. Gerhard Scheit, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2002), 179-350.

³ For an interesting study of the complicated reception of Améry, cf. Rainer Brandenburg, “Zwischen Morosität und Moral. Jean Améry im Spiegel der Kritik,” *Modern Austrian Literature* 23, no. 1 (1990), 69-84. Brandenburg concludes that the many honors Améry received served to “wegloben” him. Whether Améry preferred narrative fiction over essay writing is unclear; after all, *Lefeu* and his later narrative work, *Charles Bovary*, are both, by his own definition, essay-novels. Cf. Jean Améry, *Charles Bovary, Landarzt. Porträt eines einfachen Mannes*, in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 4, Charles Bovary, Landarzt*, ed. Hanjo Kesting (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2006).

⁴ Améry, *Lefeu*, 481. In this edition of the “Nachwort,” the word ‘auch’ is not emphasized, but it is emphasized twice in the original 1974 edition. Cf. Jean Améry, *Lefeu oder Der Abbruch. Roman-Essay* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1982), 172.

Abbruch in the spring of 1974.⁵ While *Lefeu* was commercially unsuccessful and hardly left any mark in the literary history of West Germany, Améry considered it his best and most important work, to which he referred time and again as his favorite and dearest book.⁶ *Lefeu* provided Améry with a platform to imagine his life differently, and he chose to imagine a character who, like himself, had survived Nazi persecution but—unlike Améry—withdrew entirely from public life until he considered the possibility of violence as a means to avenge himself. In this important regard Améry's novel-essay warrants close examination in connection with the previous chapter. Since Améry places tools of vengeful violence into Lefeu's hands, does *Lefeu* mark the author's movement from his philosophy of ressentiments towards a politics of revenge?⁷

Heidelberger-Leonard in particular has frequently argued that *Lefeu* should be read as a continuation of or sequel to *Die Schiffbrüchigen*,⁸ the novel manuscript that Améry began in the mid-1930s and returned to after his liberation, but which remained—"glücklicherweise"—unpublished during his lifetime.⁹ Such a reading is based on certain personality traits shared by the main characters of both works. Améry planned Lefeu as "das Urbild des Mannes, der nein sagt,"¹⁰ a characterization that Heidelberger-Leonard applies to Eugen Althager, the protagonist in *Die*

⁵ Améry, *Lefeu*, 484. Again, the double emphasis appears in the original: Améry, *Lefeu* (1982), 174.

⁶ In a 1978 televised interview Améry said about *Lefeu*: "Unter den von mir geschriebenen Büchern ist es das verkaufsmäßig erfolgloseste, mir aber teuerste. Und ich glaube, es ist das Beste, was ich je geschrieben habe." Reprinted in: Améry and Hermann, "Jean Améry im Gespräch," 117f. Améry repeatedly called *Lefeu* his favorite book elsewhere, cf. Améry, letter to Hubert Arbogast, June 26, 1978 (DLA 86.730/1).

⁷ Dania Hueckmann is currently working on a dissertation at New York University, in which she anticipates reading *Lefeu* as Améry's revenge fantasy. Dania Hueckmann, email to the author, April 19, 2009.

⁸ Ivonn Kappel convincingly argues against such reading, cf. Ivonn Kappel, "In fremden Spiegeln sehen wir das eigene Bild." *Jean Amérys Lefeu oder Der Abbruch* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009), 36-42.

⁹ Améry, *Lefeu*, 481.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 482.

Schiffbrüchigen, as well.¹¹ She draws thematic connections between the two texts, both of which touch on issues of suicide, language, and the decay of society. And she cites Améry's short biography of his painter-friend Erich Schmid, published in 1959, as evidence that Améry had begun planning *Lefeu* as early as the 1950s—that is, once he had abandoned *Die Schiffbrüchigen*. Améry did indeed use Schmid as a model for *Lefeu*, but he dated his initial idea for the *Lefeu* project to the mid-1960s when he was working on *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*.¹² Rather than attempting another comparative reading of *Lefeu* and *Die Schiffbrüchigen*, I exclude Améry's early work from my analysis of the 1974 text, focusing on *Lefeu oder Der Abbruch* in order to examine it as the product of his evolving philosophy of resentiments.¹³

Essayistic Writing

In a 1971 letter to his friend Ernst Mayer Améry lamented his decision to have abandoned narrative in favor of journalistic and essayistic writing and wondered whether, by the standards of “was man heute Prosa nennt,” he could pick up where he had left off with *Die Schiffbrüchigen* and still pass for an acceptable writer.¹⁴ In his

¹¹ Cf. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard, “*Lefeu oder der Abbruch*--Summa der eigenen Existenz?,” in *Jean Améry, der Schriftsteller. Internationale Tagung zum 20. Todestag von Jean Améry in Brüssel*, ed. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard and Hans Höller (Stuttgart: Hans-Dieter Heinz/Akademischer Verlag Stuttgart, 2000), 147-61. Reprinted in: Irene Heidelberger-Leonard, *Jean Améry im Dialog mit der zeitgenössischen Literatur. Essays*, ed. Hans Höller (Stuttgart: Verlag Hans-Dieter Heinz/Akademischer Verlag Stuttgart, 2002), 163-78, here 166.

¹² Améry, *Lefeu*, 480. Améry mentions Schmid in connection with *Lefeu* starting in 1971. Cf. Améry, letter to Hans Mayer, November 16, 1971, in: Améry, *Briefe*, 384.

¹³ Cf. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard, “Autobiographische Geschichtsschreibung vor und nach Auschwitz. Jean Amérys *Die Schiffbrüchigen* (1934) und *Lefeu oder der Abbruch* (1974),” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 123 (2004), 220-31; Irene Heidelberger-Leonard, “‘Das Problem der Neinsage, ihrer Herkunft und Zukunft.’ *Die Schiffbrüchigen* als Vorübung zu *Lefeu oder Der Abbruch*,” *Text + Kritik* 99 (1988), 33-39; Irene Heidelberger-Leonard, “*Lefeu oder Der Abbruch*: Summa der eigenen Existenz?,” in *Jean Améry im Dialog mit der zeitgenössischen Literatur*, ed. Hans Höller (Stuttgart: Verlag Hans-Dieter Heinz/Akademischer Verlag Stuttgart, 2002), 163-78.

¹⁴ Améry makes explicit mention of his early novel, asking: “Ist nicht allzu viel hingegangen seit den ‘Schiffbrüchigen’?” Mayer had witnessed (and shared) Améry's literary ambitions in the 1930s, when Améry wrote *Die Schiffbrüchigen* and both men edited the journal *Die Brücke*. Améry, letter to Ernst Mayer, November 16, 1971, in: Améry, *Briefe*, 384. Throughout the process of writing *Lefeu*, Améry

opinion contemporary prose suffered from the influences of post-structuralist literary theory. He was inspired to write *Lefeu* to contest literary trends of the day and stand up to postmodern “Wörterzerkleinerer.”¹⁵ He wrote *Merkur* editor Hans Paeschke: “Vage denke ich daran, die Kontestation [=Strukturalismus] zu kontestieren durch *Produktion*: etwas soll entstehen, was ich einen Roman-Essay nennen möchte und was das Absurde ad absurdum führen soll.”¹⁶ Améry specifically aimed to position himself as the intellectual contender of Michel Foucault and to address questions of language and its ability to represent reality adequately. Améry was familiar with Foucault’s 1966 *Lets mots et les choses* and was in fact the first German-speaking intellectual to discuss it widely, especially at the time of its 1971 translation into German.¹⁷

confides in Mayer his insecurities about writing narrative prose. Cf. Améry, letter to Mayer, January 17, 1973, in: Améry, *Briefe*, 414.

¹⁵ Améry, letter to Hans Paeschke, January 17, 1972, in: Améry, *Briefe*, 392.

¹⁶ Améry, letter to Paeschke, December 16, 1971, in: *ibid.*, 390. Améry’s relationship to post-structuralism is well documented. In an important interview given by Améry shortly before his suicide, he summarized his polemical view on post-structuralism, which, in the early 1970s, he refers to by using the name of its predecessor, structuralism, as follows: “Ich habe den Strukturalismus immer für abwegig gehalten. Ich habe mich mit dem Strukturalismus beschäftigt, aber immer polemisch. Ich habe den Strukturalismus immer abgelehnt.” Améry and Hermann, “Jean Améry im Gespräch,” 115.

¹⁷ Or so Améry says in a letter to Rudolf Hartung at *Neue Rundschau*, August 26, 1971 (DLA 81.1592/10). Hartung had asked Améry to write an essay about Foucault, to which Améry agreed, noting that he was “der erste im deutschen Sprachbereich, der seinerzeit auf ihn [=Foucault] aufmerksam machte.” Améry was miffed with Hans Paeschke when the *Merkur* editor commissioned someone else to cover Foucault, whom Améry believed to be “meine Thematik.” Améry, letter to Paeschke, December 12, 1976 (DLA 81.1698/9). Cf. Améry’s essays on Foucault 1973-78: Jean Améry, “Wider den Strukturalismus. Das Beispiel des Michel Foucault,” in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 6, Aufsätze zur Philosophie*, ed. Gerhard Scheit (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2004), 78-105; Jean Améry, “Michel Foucaults Vision des Kerker-Universums,” in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 6, Aufsätze zur Philosophie*, ed. Gerhard Scheit (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2004), 205-18; Jean Améry, “Michel Foucault und sein ‘Diskurs’ der Gegen-Aufklärung,” in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 6, Aufsätze zur Philosophie*, ed. Gerhard Scheit (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2004), 219-31. Several earlier (unpublished) texts are at archived under “Konv. Michel Foucault” (DLA, 81.1355).

Améry derided Foucault as a mouthpiece of a new movement within French philosophy that he deemed highly dangerous: “Die neuen Philosophen lehnen im wesentlichen die französische Aufklärung ab, an der ich hänge. (...) [D]ie Ablehnung, die dort erfolgt, ist eine vollständig irrationalistische, sie läuft auf Nihilismus und totalen Kulturpessimismus heraus. Diese jungen Menschen, die das wirkliche Elend selber gar nicht erlebt haben, sondern nur vom Hörensagen kennen, die reden uns nun ein, wir lebten im Osten und im Westen in der Hölle. An dieser Hölle sei der Rationalismus schuld, das Denken, das Wissen, das den Menschen unterdrücke. Ich glaube nach wie vor, dass Denken und Wissen den Menschen befreien. Ich lehne sie vor allem als Irrationalisten ab, die sie sind, zumal sie keine Alternative bringen. Sie sind gegen die Ratio, sie sind gegen jegliche Ordnung, sie sind Anarchisten. Ich weiß nicht, wohin das führen soll. Und ich kann sie nur als Symptom sehen,

Furthermore, Améry sought a platform to engage with contemporary ideas on language as expressed in literature, e.g., in Helmut Heißenbüttel's *D'Alemberts Ende*, a book Améry refused to review, despite liking the author, because he had little sympathy for Heißenbüttel's avant-garde poetics.¹⁸ As an antidote to the *nouveau roman*, Améry aimed to write the "Anti-Antiroman"¹⁹ that would reaffirm the power of language and of the narrating subject.²⁰

Améry's motivation for *Lefeu*, in sum, was his personal desire to write prose, coupled with what he believed to be his obligation as a public intellectual to engage with contemporary thoughts on poetics and language. These separate drives required Améry to find a form that would suit both, and he believed he found it in the essay-novel, a term he applied to *Lefeu* without providing a definition of the genre. He combined novel and essay to create a space in which "der Wunsch zu erzählen sich vereinigte mit dem Verlangen, eine höhere Reflexionsebene zu erklimmen."²¹ Within a narrative framework and through the voice of a fictional character, he hoped to reflect on issues left untouched or insufficiently explored in his journalistic and essayistic writings.

als Symptom einer Auflösung nicht nur aller Werte, sondern auch aller Chancen, die wir haben." Améry and Hermann, "Jean Améry im Gespräch," 116f.

¹⁸ Cf. Heidelberger-Leonard, *Améry Revolte*, 286. Heidelberger-Leonard describes Améry and Heißenbüttel's friendship as burdened by the two men's differing opinions on poetic language, and she considers *Lefeu* the reason the friendship ended. This is not evident from their correspondence, which remains friendly and respectful even when Améry and Heißenbüttel disagree. In fact, Améry counted Heißenbüttel (and Rudolf Hartung) among "den ganz wenigen Menschen im Literaturbetrieb, die ich meine Freunde nenne." Améry, letter to Hartung, August 21, 1978 (DLA 81.1595/6). For their differing opinion on literary form, cf. Améry, letter to Heißenbüttel, July 18, 1972, in: Améry, *Briefe*, 400; Heißenbüttel, letter to Améry, August 2, 1972 (DLA 81.1983/15).

¹⁹ Jean Améry, "Lefeu oder Der Abbruch. Konzept zu einem Roman-Essay," in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 1, Die Schiffbrüchigen, Lefeu oder Der Abbruch*, ed. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2007), 649-60, here 660.

²⁰ Améry repeatedly lamented the loss of the subject and the lack of trust in language, which he saw crystallized in the *nouveau roman* and its (Heideggerian) proponents. Cf. Jean Améry, "Wege, Holzwege, Auswege des Neuen Romans," *Schweizer Rundschau* 63 (1964), 305-13; Jean Améry, "Vertrauen in die Sprache. Bemerkungen zu einer modischen Unsicherheit," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, November 19, 1973.

²¹ Améry, *Lefeu*, 484.

Scholars of the essay agree that the only distinctive feature of the essay is its reluctance to submit to precise characterization; according to the author of the most recent comprehensive analysis of the German essay, Sargut Şölçün, the essayistic idea is not definable.²² In spite of the ineffability of the essay, a plethora of descriptions attempt to capture certain “essayistic virtues.”²³ Ludwig Rohner, for instance, concluded in his 1966 study on the essay—an ambitious monograph of almost 1,000 pages—that the essay is a “Stück betrachtsamer Prosa” that circles around one theme, proceeds associatively, and unfolds in dialogue with its imagined reader.²⁴ The essay, albeit declaring “Formlosigkeit (...) zum Formprinzip,” is by his definition rigidly composed as “Denkerzählung” that aims at illustrating and reflecting on an event or concrete object to gain broader, abstract understanding.²⁵ Most significantly, the essay is the subjective rendering of a personal experience or opinion. The essayist is a moralist, and often he documents his experience “gegen die Zeit” in an attempt to open his contemporaries’ eyes to a moral truth overlooked by society.²⁶ According to Rohner the essay thus leads “through experience to truth.”²⁷

Beginning with Michel de Montaigne and Francis Bacon, the intellectual fathers of this literary genre new to the sixteenth century, the essay submits to radical subjectivity as its absolute authority, from which it arrives at larger truths.²⁸ Friedrich

²² Sargut Şölçün, *Unerhörter Gang des Wartenden. Dekonstruktive Wendungen in der deutschen Essayistik* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1998), 28. Although the study focuses on the first third of the twentieth century, Şölçün’s introduction is instructive on the essay in general. Cf. Ralph-Rainer Wuthenow, “Der Essay (...) ist schlechthin nicht zu definieren,” qtd. in: Dagmar C. G. Lorenz, *Scheitern als Ereignis. Der Autor Jean Améry im Kontext europäischer Kulturkritik* (Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 1991), 95.

²³ G. Douglas Atkins, *Tracing the Essay. Through Experience to Truth* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2005), 4.

²⁴ Ludwig Rohner, *Der deutsche Essay. Materialien zur Geschichte und Ästhetik einer literarischen Gattung* (Neuwied, Berlin: Luchterhand, 1966).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 673f.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 676.

²⁷ Cf. subtitle of Atkins, *Tracing the Essay*.

²⁸ In the introduction to his *Essays*, Montaigne writes: “It is myself that I portray. (...) I am myself the matter of my book.” Michel Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), 2.

Schlegel emerged as the first German essayist and popularized the form in the eighteenth century. In line with Montaigne's emphasis on the subjective nature of the essay and its ambition towards moral betterment, Schlegel defined the essay as a type of "Experimentalphilosophie" that originates in "der reinen Ethik."²⁹ Throughout the nineteenth century, the essay emancipated itself from the Enlightenment's pedagogic mission to constitute and educate a public and metamorphosed into an "existentielle Kategorie" of the individual.³⁰ Şölçün observes that for the first third of the twentieth century the essayist articulated his affective condition, which he describes in the decades between the wars as a melancholic "Bewusstsein des Scheiterns" coupled with the utopian hope of achieving harmony between subjective and empirical (or social) life.³¹ With these hopes dashed by World War II, the essay appeared to have been driven to extinction, and in the 1950s insecurities regarding the genre culminated in the anxious question of whether German writers were still capable of writing an essay at all. As late as the 1970s prospects for the essay's survival in Germany were seen as dim.³²

Despite the decline in German essay-writing after the war, the form was not abandoned altogether, and its practitioners returned to its Enlightenment roots. In what is probably the most famous German treatise on the essay, "Der Essay als Form," Theodor W. Adorno directly links the essay, with its evocation of intellectual freedom, to the Enlightenment. Moreover, he connects his fellow Germans' "Unbehagen" and "Vorurteil" against the form to the failure of the Enlightenment project in Germany and the subsequent underdevelopment of intellectual freedom there.³³ The peculiar

²⁹ Qtd. in: Rohner, *Der deutsche Essay*, 86f. Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe*, Bd. 18/2, *Philosophische Lehrjahre 1796-1806*, ed. Ernst Behler (Munich: Schöningh, 1963), 202, 09.

³⁰ Cf. Şölçün, *Unerhörter Gang*, 32; Lorenz, *Scheitern als Ereignis*, 101.

³¹ Şölçün, *Unerhörter Gang*, 32f.

³² Ibid., 28, 30.

³³ Theodor W. Adorno, "Der Essay als Form," in *Noten zur Literatur* (Berlin, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1958), 9-49, 9f.

German disdain for the essay, Adorno writes, stems from its hybrid construction spanning the two domains of (irrational) art and (rational) science, which in Germany are rigidly separated. According to Adorno, the essay rebels against this separation: it reflects intellectually on the causes of strong affective responses in the past.³⁴ It thus elevates the ephemeral and transitory—generally ignored by philosophy—as worthy of philosophical investigation, not to find “das Ewige im Vergänglichen” but to “[verewigen] das Vergängliche.”³⁵ The essay thus relies on the subject to gain necessary insights about human relations and social connections that are beyond the grasp of empirical science, and the essayist obtains these insights exclusively through the articulation of his own “in Hoffnung und Desillusion zusammengehaltene einzelmenschliche Erfahrung.”³⁶

In an intellectual environment that Adorno describes as hostile to the essay, Améry deliberately decided on the essay form as the only written medium through which he could reflect on his past experiences. According to Dagmar Lorenz, Améry had successfully transitioned with *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* from journalism to essay writing.³⁷ The essay, with its reflection on what caused a strong affect in the past, was the perfect medium for Améry to analyze his *ressentiments*. Abjuring melancholia or a hidden utopian goal, Améry’s essays conform to Enlightenment ideals of reason and at the same time follow closely Adorno’s prescription for the genre and his emphasis on affect.

In the preface to *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*, Améry explains that his “Überlegungen” or reflections are part of the early Enlightenment tradition and its “Willen zur Empathie”: rather than promoting logical deduction or empirical

³⁴ Cf. Ibid., 11.

³⁵ Ibid., 23, 25.

³⁶ Ibid., 11, 19.

³⁷ Cf. Lorenz, *Scheitern als Ereignis*, 108.

verification as an end, he uses these merely as a means to critique social reality.³⁸ Améry agrees with Adorno's verdict that the essay is "die kritische Form par excellence"³⁹; for Améry, the essay is not only an expository but a *literary* form, one that takes responsibility and has a function within the public sphere. In contrast to the historical and juridical analyses of the Holocaust that belatedly swept Germany in the 1960s, Améry offered insights derived from direct experience rather than academically sound but abstract investigations. The essay form lends itself to Améry's taking of the "ich" as the "einzig brauchbare[n] Ansatzpunkt."⁴⁰ Use of the first-person voice is crucial to Améry's reflective attempts. In the autobiographical *Örtlichkeiten* (1980) that traces Améry's life stations, the author speaks for large stretches through a third-person narrator, yet in the final essay recalling the genesis of *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* the voice changes to the first person. The "[i]ch" emerges in close proximity to "Auschwitz-Prozess." In other words the appearance of the "I" mirrors the historical emergence of the Auschwitz writer Améry, who is prompted by the Auschwitz trials to address his German audience. Améry playfully asks the reader of *Örtlichkeiten* where "das Ich, die erste Person" might have suddenly come from, and answers in all seriousness: "Ja, *ich* war es, der von Auschwitz reden wollte, in deutscher Sprache."⁴¹ For Améry, the "ich," the self, becomes constituted—essayistically—only in the act of wanting to speak of Auschwitz, and to do so in German.

Like Adorno's ideal essay, Améry's essays are non-systematic, fragmentary, and unbound by rules. They borrow freely from poetic language and allow for the exploration of margins, gaining momentum through association, suggestion, and reflection. Since Améry remembers experiences that were "die Negation positiver

³⁸ Améry, *Jenseits*, 18.

³⁹ Adorno, "Der Essay," 39.

⁴⁰ Améry, *Jenseits*, 21.

⁴¹ Améry, *Örtlichkeiten*, 471.

Identität,⁴² he depends on the essay form, which is distinct because it accounts for the non-identical, according to Adorno.⁴³ What Adorno and Améry celebrate “is not only the essay’s open form and conscious lack of a dogmatic position but ultimately its lack of intellectual security, its lack of an affirmative ideal of truth.”⁴⁴ Given his experience in the camps, Améry clearly refuses the idea of intellectual security and therefore needs to deny his readers any possibility of retaining the same.⁴⁵ The incompleteness of the essay—the fact that it “nicht mit Adam und Eva an[fängt] sondern mit dem, worüber er [der Essay] reden will; er (...) bricht ab, wo er selber am Ende sich fühlt”⁴⁶—serves to prevent Améry’s audience from identifying with him and his experiences. Améry explicitly states that it is necessary for the conflict between the past and the present to remain unresolved: “Ich rebelliere: gegen meine Vergangenheit, gegen die Geschichte, gegen eine Gegenwart, die das Unbegreifliche einfrieren läßt und es damit auf empörende Weise verfälscht.”⁴⁷ The essay is representative of Améry’s rebellion because its thinking happens in fits and starts; it finds a tentative unity by juxtaposing, not harmonizing, the breaks and gaps from which it is constituted.⁴⁸ The essay promises no easy healing but confronts the present with concrete past experiences on which it reflects.

For Adorno, the essay gains substance precisely because it examines a lived experience in historical time.⁴⁹ If truth has a temporal core, he continues, it must be history. The notion of truth here is important. Adorno celebrates the essay for it “entledigt sich (...) der traditionellen Idee von der Wahrheit.”⁵⁰ Nevertheless, he

⁴² Scheit, “Nachwort [zu *Jenseits*],” 656.

⁴³ Cf. Adorno, “Der Essay,” 22.

⁴⁴ Peter Uwe Hohendahl, *Prismatic Thought. Theodor W. Adorno* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 234.

⁴⁵ Cf. the first essay, “An den Grenzen des Geistes,” *Jenseits*, 23-54.

⁴⁶ Adorno, “Der Essay,” 11.

⁴⁷ Améry, *Jenseits*, 18.

⁴⁸ Cf. Adorno, “Der Essay,” 35.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

affirms the essay—and only the essay—as truth itself precisely because it denies completeness. The essay does not state the truth but *is* truth. It becomes truth specifically by reflecting on individual sensations that are, in comparison to the grand narratives of history, belittled by theory.⁵¹ The constitutive fragmentation of the essay and its pronounced exclusions would appear to entail untruth, yet for Adorno, truth must be articulated through untruth, which he defines as the absence of correspondence (*Übereinstimmung*) between language and reality.⁵² In fact, truth can only be approximated via untruth. The essay acknowledges that it is only a representation of an object or event, and that it is characterized first and foremost by its acceptance of the non-identity of language and reality (without denying language the ability to represent reality).⁵³ As a consequence of this fundamental non-identity, language always negotiates truth by means of untruth. The essay addresses this problem consciously, which is why the deliberate inclusion of untruth is, according to Adorno, “das Element seiner [=des Essays] Wahrheit.”⁵⁴ The essay, despite its subjectivity and the non-identity of language and reality, does not foreclose the possibility of arriving at intersubjectively valid and therefore true conclusions. Its approximation of truth, which never goes beyond an attempt or *essai*, makes the essay an appropriate written form for Améry to communicate his experience as a victim of the Nazis and to explore the condition of his survival in postwar Germany.

Because of their intrinsically personal and subjective nature, essays often evidence autobiographical elements. In Améry’s case they might even be said to replace the autobiography. All of Améry’s autobiographical writing takes the form of the essay, and almost all of his essays are autobiographical. The essay also overlaps

⁵¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 24.

⁵² Hohendahl, *Prismatic Thought*, 235. Cf. Adorno, “Der Essay,” 40.

⁵³ Cf. Adorno, “Der Essay,” 38.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

with the novel, as Rohner points out when he stresses the narrative qualities of the essay as form. Far from having created the essay-novel *ex nihilo*, Améry followed the example of Robert Musil, whose *Mann ohne Eigenschaften* is, by all accounts, the most famous of essay-novels.⁵⁵ While Améry credits neither Adorno nor Musil for any influence on his own writing, his oeuvre is indebted to them both. Long before he finished *Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (1930-1942), Musil wrote an article on the genre in which he wrote in reference to the essay:

Seine Gedanken sitzen unablässig in einem Mutterboden fest aus Gefühl, Willen, persönlichen Erfahrungen und solchen Verbindungen von Ideenkomplexen, die nur in der seelischen Atmosphäre einer einzigen inneren Situation volles Licht empfangen und geben.⁵⁶

Améry's main pursuit in writing the essays for *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* was to expose himself entirely to the light shed onto the self by one experience, and then to enlighten others to the human condition as he bore witness to it. The desire to compose a novel did not alter Améry's conviction that he had to write from the center of the self, which is shaped by subjective experience. The essay-novel form, with its emphasis on personal experience and thus autobiographical details, was Améry's preferred choice to realize his narrative ambitions. It offered him the means to defend the individual subject and its communicable experience against what he saw as the pitfalls of structuralism and post-structuralism, namely the anti-humanist outlook shared by both movements, and their rejection of the Enlightenment subject.

⁵⁵ Robert Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, in: *Gesammelte Werke in neun Bänden. Bd. 1-5*, ed. Adolf Frisé (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978). Rohner contends that in addition to Musil (whom he counts, along with James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, André Gide, Marcel Proust, and Jean-Paul Sartre, among the most important international essay-novelists), Thomas Mann succeeded admirably at combining the novel with the essay, in particular in *Doktor Faustus*. Rohner, *Der deutsche Essay*, 573, 575. Améry himself names Proust, Gide, Joyce, and Mann as inspiration, Améry, *Lefeu*, 484.

⁵⁶ Robert Musil, "Essaybücher," in *Gesammelte Werke in neun Bänden. Bd. 9, Kritik*, ed. Adolf Frisé (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978), 1450-57, here 1450.

An Overarching Subplot

In the early summer of 1972 Améry sent Hubert Arbogast, his editor at Klett publishing house, and Helmut Heißenbüttel of *Süddeutscher Rundfunk* a fairly detailed abstract of *Lefeu oder Der Abbruch*, which already included the text's division into chapters according to plot development and essayistic reflection. Both men agreed to support the project on air and in print,⁵⁷ which allowed Améry to work in his now-familiar manner of writing shorter pieces intended for one-hour broadcast installments before publishing the series of texts as a book. The essay-novel formally resembled all of Améry's earlier essay collections, with one difference. In addition to six chapter-length essays united by a common thematic thread (in this case a storyline), *Lefeu* included the epilogue "Warum und wie," which Améry intended to be read as part of the essay-novel. In it he reflected on the process of writing *Lefeu*, so as to limit the objectification of the novel by literary critics and to guide future interpretations.⁵⁸

Améry began writing *Lefeu* in the fall of 1972 and, as before, submitted each essay (or chapter, in this case) for broadcast upon completion. He made final edits in the winter of 1974, and Klett published *Lefeu oder Der Abbruch* in March of that year. Anticipating a positive reception, Améry left his freelance position with *Die Zeit*; remaining in the post would have precluded a review of *Lefeu* in the paper because of conflict of interest considerations. He explained that now as a "Berufsschriftsteller," his livelihood depended on the free advertising that favorable reviews generated.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Améry, "Lefeu oder der Abbruch. Konzept." Améry recorded readings of *Lefeu* for broadcast, and he actively shaped the production by submitting suggestions for accompanying music. Cf. Améry, letter to Heißenbüttel, November 13, 1973 (DLA 81.1607/8). *Süddeutscher Rundfunk* paid Améry DM 2,400 per *Lefeu* installment. Cf. Heißenbüttel, letter to Améry, August 2, 1972 (DLA 81.1983/15).

⁵⁸ Cf. Améry, *Lefeu*, 502. Améry modeled his epilogue after Thomas Mann's essay on the genesis of *Doktor Faustus*, "Entstehung des Doktor Faustus." Cf. Améry, letter to Rudolf Hartung, December 12, 1973, in: Améry, *Briefe*, 438. Although in the first edition of *Lefeu* the epilogue is printed entirely in italics, Améry meant it to appear identical in form to the main text and as "direkte Fortsetzung des essayistischen Teils der Arbeit." Cf. Améry, letter to Günter Kunert, June 24, 1974, in: *ibid.*, 457.

⁵⁹ Améry, letter to Rolf Michaelis, February 7, 1974, in: *ibid.*, 440.

With the completion of *Lefeu* Améry evidently began to see himself as a professional literary author. Indeed, he entertained the idea of writing a film-script to televise the novel and even entered into (ultimately unfruitful) negotiations with *Bayerischer Rundfunk* to do so.⁶⁰ He also began planning a new novel, revisiting the historical Macbeth story.⁶¹

In the proposal written for Arbogast and Heißenbüttel, Améry had clearly stated that in *Lefeu* the essayistic element of reflection would propel the work and pose a “klares Übergewicht [gegenüber den Ereignissen].”⁶² The story itself would be fairly simple, and the characters would not amount to “Romanfiguren im üblichen Sinne,” but lack individualized language, traits and appearance in favor of their equal ability to reflect.⁶³ At stake in *Lefeu*, Améry insisted, was to legitimize beyond doubt “das *Vertrauen in die Sprache*,” and this endeavor was to guide both the shape of the novel and its plot.⁶⁴

At least in the first four chapters the story of the Parisian painter Lefeu indeed seems secondary to reflections on a handful of abstract topics, foremost among them language, decay, and time. In the proposal Améry had identified three narrative strands, “die erste and wichtigste” of which describes the demolition of Lefeu’s home, an uninhabitable former factory building set to be replaced by modern construction, a process that forces Lefeu out of his apartment after he loses a lawsuit against real estate investors. The second storyline traces Lefeu’s negotiations with German art dealers who hope to sell his paintings for large profits in Germany, a country with great demand for art consumption because of its booming economy. Though Lefeu’s painterly style is out-of-date by international standards, the art dealers hope to market

⁶⁰ Cf. Heidelberger-Leonard, *Améry Revolte*, 293.

⁶¹ Cf. Améry, letter to Hubert Arbogast, February 21, 1975 (DLA 81.1644/1).

⁶² Améry, “Lefeu oder der Abbruch. Konzept,” 649.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 652.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 649. Emphasis in the original.

his dark city landscapes aggressively as a paradoxical form of avant-garde nostalgia (or melancholia) by calling the style metaphysical realism. The third plot concerns Lefeu's girlfriend Irene, a poet striving for "modernste Ausdrucksmittel" that in fact are nonsensical, thereby participating in what Améry believed to be contemporary trends in language philosophy that fashionably declare the death of language itself. To strike a blow against proponents of the death of language, Améry entertained the possibility of Irene committing suicide after she has lost language.⁶⁵

Améry planned these three narratives to be the "Hauptachsen" of *Lefeu oder Der Abbruch*, around which minor events would take place. In the *exposé* he describes one of these "angedeutete[n] Nebenhandlungen":

Bei einer Reise nach dem Béarn fährt er [=Lefeu] an dem Komplex „Gaz de Lacq“ vorbei, sieht die Flammen in den nächtlichen Himmel stechen. Wurden nicht seine Eltern in Deutschland vergast und verbrannt? Es scheint so. Jedenfalls bringt der Eindruck des Flammens und Flackerns und die Beziehung seines Namens zum Feuer ihn auf den Gedanken, jene in seinem Pariser Stadtviertel neu errichteten Gebäudekomplexe, denen nicht nur seine äußere Wohnung, sondern auch seine innere—seine optische Welt—zum Opfer fallen soll, in Brand zu stecken.⁶⁶

This minor subplot clearly concerns Améry's two major affective and intellectual battles: Nazi-victimization and redemptive violence.

The visit to Gaz de Lacq occurs in the fifth chapter of *Lefeu*, where it marks the breaking point of the narrative. Lefeu's recognition that his parents were murdered and his subsequent statement "*ich erinnere mich*" (italicized for emphasis and repeated several times) signal the involuntary eruption of repressed memories. After having written the Gaz de Lacq episode, Améry is unable to return to his reflections on language—channeled through Lefeu—as the primary concern of *Lefeu*; in fact, Améry

⁶⁵ Ibid., 650.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 651.

posits the temporary defeat of language when his narrator Lefeu is confronted with traumatic memories. With Lefeu's ride through Lacq, the focus of the novel shifts from a defense of language to a question of redemptive violence. Lefeu's arbitrary survival of a murderous past leads him to suffer survivor's guilt and to seek to redeem the past through a violent act against Paris and himself. The uneasy decision to avenge himself (and his parents) becomes the overarching theme of the remainder of the novel. If Améry had initially aimed to contest the fragility of language (and thereby Foucault and contemporary language theories), he ends up revisiting the question of his own past and contemplating possibilities for revenge.

Lefeu, né Feuermann; Améry, né Mayer? *Lefeu* as “Auto-Existenzanalyse”⁶⁷

Améry had furthered his early reputation by writing the series “Bildnisse berühmter Zeitgenossen” for the *St. Galler Tagblatt*. In 1959 he submitted to the paper a short portrait of his friend, the largely unknown painter Erich Schmid, entitled “Bildnisse (un)berühmter Zeitgenossen: Unbekannter Maler E.S.”⁶⁸ Because Schmid served Améry as a model for the character of Lefeu, the article warrants attention.

Améry had met the Viennese artist Schmid in Austria before both emigrated to Antwerp, and they were incarcerated together in St. Cyprien and Gurs. Unlike Améry, Schmid stayed in southern France after his escape from Gurs and joined the Maquis, the armed guerrilla bands of the French resistance, to avoid persecution by the Vichy regime. Schmid fought the Germans in the French army after France's liberation before settling permanently in Paris once the war ended. There he resumed his

⁶⁷ Améry, *Lefeu*, 497.

⁶⁸ Reprinted in: Jean Améry, “Die neuen Mönche. Bildnisse (un)berühmter Zeitgenossen: Unbekannter Maler E.S.,” in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 1, Die Schiffbrüchigen, Lefeu oder Der Abbruch*, ed. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2007), 643-49.

painting career, which had been disrupted by the Nazis, who had considered his work “degenerate,” and by the strenuousness of emigration.

Améry and Schmid stayed in close contact, exchanging letters and visiting each other frequently; Schmid considered Améry his best friend.⁶⁹ In the newspaper article Améry omitted mention of his friendship with Schmid, and he also elided the fact that Schmid was Jewish and that the artist’s parents had perished in Auschwitz.⁷⁰ Améry prefaced the article by commenting that not only famous people shape history, but also “Unberühmte, Noch-nicht-Berühmte, Niemals-berühmt-Werdende, (...) Scheiternde.” In the text he did not emphasize Schmid’s past as a Jewish victim (though he did describe his resistance activities), but focused rather on his postwar struggle to succeed as an artist.

In 1945, after years of enforced artistic inactivity, Schmid came to the painful realization that he was unable to compete with contemporary artists and that his paintings, once considered avant-garde, had become outdated. He experimented with abstract art but returned to his relatively more realistic style in a refusal to bow to the pressures of the contemporary art market. Améry’s most pressing question in the article was whether Schmid “zum ‘Gestrigen’ geworden [war], nachdem er kaum ein ‘Heutiger’ gewesen ist?”⁷¹ Améry identified with Schmid’s failure to succeed on a career path that had seemed so promising in the 1930s, a failure thrust upon him by the Nazis, whose persecution had forced him to emigrate from Austria illegally and go into hiding. Améry saw his own fate mirrored in Schmid’s: he too had had to abandon what he considered his evolving career as a literary writer, a career he could not restart

⁶⁹ Cf. Heidelberger-Leonard, *Améry Revolte*, 275.

⁷⁰ Cf. Heidelberger-Leonard, “Nachwort [*Lefeu*],” 669.

⁷¹ Améry, “Neuen Mönche,” 647. Améry’s fascination with this question is apparent in the 1961 publication *Geburt der Gegenwart*, in which he ponders the artist’s position vis-à-vis growing demands of the market. Cf. chapter “Kultureinheit der Konsumgesellschaft,” in: Améry, *Geburt der Gegenwart*. 241-300. In the English translation, the subtitle to the book is *Culture in a Consumer Society*.

after 1945. Unlike Améry, who adapted to the demands of the day and worked in journalism for decades, Schmid refused to do so; he became a “Neinsager” (a term discussed below) and the model for Lefeu. The Schmid/Lefeu character in this way acts as a counterpoint to the successful public figures Améry had covered in his earlier portrait serie.⁷²

The similarities between Schmid and Lefeu are easy to detect. Most obviously, Schmid’s living situation informed the setting of *Lefeu*. Both Schmid and Lefeu live in almost uninhabitable spaces that reek of dirt and filth but consist of a certain “pittoreske Elendsästhetik.”⁷³ Améry used the French term *clochard* (tramp) to describe both men. Lefeu’s painting *L’oiseau de malheur*, whose symbolism of the curse of the hook-nose has such importance for the novel, was in fact a Schmid creation that belonged to Améry, who had previously mentioned it in his article of 1959. Scattered throughout the novel are clues to Lefeu’s background. Read in reverse order, they tell the story of an assimilated Jew from southern Germany (not Austria) who fled the Nazis and joined the French resistance, and whose parents were murdered in a Nazi extermination camp. This is Schmid’s biography.

In the epilogue Améry reflects on how *Lefeu oder Der Abbruch* broke free from its author’s intentions during the writing process. Though planned from the outset as an essay-novel, Améry had anticipated hewing predominantly to the essayistic form, one that he defended as the premier written expression for every “sich bildendes, sich entwickelndes Ich, [das] vor der Welt und gegen sie steht.”⁷⁴ However,

⁷² As Lorenz points out, Améry’s early writings display a fascination with success that does not belong to the author but rather is a response to his audience’s demand for success stories. Lorenz, *Scheitern als Ereignis*, 107. The series resulted in the publication of three portrait collections. Cf. Jean Améry, *Karrieren und Köpfe. Bildnisse berühmter Zeitgenossen* (Zurich: Thomas Verlag, 1955); Jean Améry, *Teenager Stars. Idole unserer Zeit* (Rüschlikon-Zurich, Stuttgart, Vienna: Albert Müller Verlag, 1960); Jean Améry, *Im Banne des Jazz. Bildnisse grosser Jazz-Musiker* (Zurich: Albert Müller, 1961).

⁷³ Améry, “Neuen Mönche,” 645.

⁷⁴ Améry, *Lefeu*, 484. From now on page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

the novelistic element of the project allowed him to experience a freedom of association (490) that he would have otherwise suppressed, which gave rise to a multitude of images, “die autonom wurden und aus dem Unterbewusstsein neue und wieder neue, in Wahrheit uralte, aber weggesperrte, hervorholten und in das Werk einschoben” (496). The power of these images, Améry continues in the epilogue, forced him to undergo “eine Art Auto-Existenzanalyse” (497).

Thus the character of Lefeu, initially modeled after a concrete person (Schmid), became a reflection of Améry’s own autobiography. The parallels between the two are manifest immediately in the stories of their names: Améry had changed his from Maier, Mayr, Mayer, and his fictional character “machte Lefeu aus Feuermann, Feiermann, Feyermann” (474f.). According to the author, *Lefeu* was the “summa” of his life, “eine Bilanz der eigenen Existenz, des eigenen Denkens” (495). Guided by his “hartnäckig selbstgrübelnde (um nicht gestelzt zu sagen: ich suchende, ich findende) autobiographische[n] Intention” (482) that infused all of his essay collections since *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*, Améry used Lefeu as canvas to investigate the possibility of his own “Neinsage” (481) and his “Protest gegen die Epoche” (485). It was time, Améry wrote, “endlich deutlicher zu sprechen,” about his position both on language and on “Revolution und Gewalt” (483). Experiencing a phenomenon hitherto unknown to Améry as essayist, what he called a “Phänomen der Entgrenzung” and “Selbständigwerdung der Arbeit” (490f.), Améry remarked that his own person “drängte (...) sich in die Figur, füllte sie aus, formte sie um” (497), resulting in his identification with Lefeu (498). The fusion of author and character is fundamental to the form of the text and dissolves the intended balance of novelistic and essayistic elements. Repeatedly Améry’s essayistic voice interrupts the narrative of Lefeu, and this textual entanglement determines much of the structure of the novel. In this regard

the identification of Améry with Lefeu far exceeds the autobiographical information incorporated in the text.

The merging of Améry and Lefeu has another important stylistic impact on the essay-novel: both author and his character generously incorporate French into German prose. The French language carries great significance for Améry; it was the language that offered him a home in 1941, after the Flemish-speaking population of Antwerp, to which he originally had fled, delivered him to the Germans. After his escape from the prisoner camp in Gurs Améry returned to Belgium, but this time he settled in the French-speaking city of Brussels, which gave him, at least for a couple of years, a greater sense of security.⁷⁵ French was the language not only of one of the countries that defeated the Nazis, but also of the Vichy regime that collaborated with the Nazis; still Améry preferred French in everyday conversation and for reading, a preference he did not see as contradictory to his own written output, which was, for the most part, in German. In an article written shortly after the publication of *Lefeu* Améry defends bilingualism as a source of creative productivity. Rather than corrupting his mother tongue, he argued, foreign languages enriched a writer's ability to explore and play with his native language all the while protecting him from using current neologisms. More importantly, the fusion of foreign and native languages allowed emigrated authors like himself to describe their "Exilexistenz."⁷⁶ The use of French in *Lefeu*, as Améry stated in an interview regarding the essay-novel, gave expression to his situation as an exiled writer who depended on inventing and imagining his native language: "Mein Deutsch ist sicher zum Teil ein veraltetes Deutsch, zum Teil aber ein solches, das (...) ich mir ganz selbst, weil ich im fremden Sprachraum lebe, erarbeitet habe. (...) Ich musste mir mein Deutsch erfinden. In dieses von mir erfundene Deutsch

⁷⁵ Cf. Améry, *Örtlichkeiten*, 421.

⁷⁶ Jean Améry, "Vom immerwährenden Schriftsteller-Exil," *Schweizer Rundschau* 77, no. 10 (1975), 5-9, here 8.

sind selbstverständlich sehr viele französische Elemente eingegangen.”⁷⁷ Améry considers it obvious that French ought to have entered his prose, and while he admits that the free use of French vocabulary challenges his readers he defends his choices as one of the *Lefeu*’s greatest assets.

The identification of the author with his character explains why Lefeu’s ride through Gaz de Lacq and his subsequent remembrance of his parents’ deportation, conceived in the abstract as mere subplot, become the crucial episode in *Lefeu*, supplanting the issue of a neo-positivist language philosophy that Améry had deemed paramount at the outset. Instead Lefeu’s plan to commit a violent act, against the city of Paris (as an act of revolution against contemporary society) and against himself (to execute the death sentence the Nazis had proclaimed), dominates the rest of the novel. Nowhere else in Améry’s oeuvre did the author reference the issue of survivor’s guilt so openly (without, however, reflecting on it!). According to Améry, “das ewig Autobiographische” played a role here as well: while imagining Lefeu preparing for his suicide (through arson), he associated images of his own survival:

Während Lefeu bei Andersens Märchenmädchen Schwefelhölzer kaufte und in einer Garage einen Kanister Benzin forderte, dachte ich an die Selektionen, durch deren enge Maschen ich unbegreiflicherweise geschlüpft war. Kein Verlass war gewesen auf den SS-Arzt, der anno 44 mich abtastete, ob ich schon schlachtreif sei. Der Kerl hatte abgelassen von mir, weiß nicht warum. Seine Nachlässigkeit hatte ich seit 1945 schon so oftmals korrigieren wollen. (506)

Elsewhere Améry had already asked the question that Lefeu set out to answer:

Damals, als ich in so fünf bis sechs verschiedenen deutschen KZ-Lagern von Kälte und Prügeln versehrt einen Tag erwartet hatte, dem anzubrechen nie beschieden war, musste der berühmt-berüchtigte „qualitative Sprung“ sich ereignet haben. Es gab seither keine Jasage mehr: das Reich des Todes hatte sich aufgetan in der Welt. Man überlebte nicht. Nur Lemuren

⁷⁷ Améry and Hermann, "Jean Améry im Gespräch," 121.

waren aus dieser Nacht aufgestiegen. Oder, wie es im Lefeu heisst: *man hatte kein Recht, das Überstehen zu überstehen*. Die Widersinnigkeit meiner Existenz stand in mir selbst vor mir. Warum spielte ich das längst verlorene Spiel noch mit? (...) Warum spielte ich den Schriftsteller, ich, der in irgendeinem längst durchgepflügten Massengrab hätte seinen Platz finden sollen? (498f., emphasis mine)⁷⁸

In writing *Lefeu* and imagining his character living a *Neinsage* (explained below) in its full consequence, Améry admitted that he himself had failed to do the same. Despite his admiration for Schmid's rejection of contemporary trends that, had he participated in them, would have allowed him a more comfortable life, Améry, at least in his own opinion, had sold himself to the demands of the day by writing newspaper articles for a German audience, rather than novels in French. As he concludes in the epilogue, Lefeu/Schmid "führte eben die Existenz (...), die durchzustehen ich selber die Courage nicht hatte" (482).⁷⁹ Even though Améry identified with Lefeu, Lefeu and Améry were not identical; rather, the author created the character to explore the *Neinsage* that he saw as the alternative to his own postwar life.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Améry defines this qualitative leap elsewhere as "échec," as the irreversible failure or loss of self-confidence and subsequent loss of trust. To suffer from the *échec* means: "die Welt verwarf ihn [=den Kaufmann, ein Opfer des *échec*], ehe noch der Tod ihn aus der Welt nahm und die Welt verwarf. Man kann, grundsätzlich, im *échec* leben. Dies aber auf schimpfliche, gleichsam 'unnatürliche' Weise." Jean Améry, *Hand an sich legen*, in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 3, Über das Altern, Hand an sich legen*, ed. Monique Boussart (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2005), 173-344, here 225.

⁷⁹ Coincidentally Améry tried to persuade Schmid to abandon his "Neinsage" by plotting his success: Améry's wife Maria, using her maiden name, contacted the Austrian Gallery (in Vienna) to ask why Schmid, whose painting *L'oiseau de malheur* was on the cover of *Lefeu oder Der Abbruch*, was not represented in the gallery. As a consequence, Austrian gallerists got in touch with Améry to facilitate negotiations with Schmid. Améry urges Schmid to cooperate, fearing that Schmid, as Lefeu had, would refuse the offer to exhibit in his native country. Améry, letter to Schmid, September 25, 1974 (DLA 86.768a/10). Schmid, who recognized himself in Lefeu, appreciated *Lefeu oder Der Abbruch*, as evidenced by his correspondence with Améry. Cf. Schmid, letter to Améry, without date (DLA 86.982/7). As if *Lefeu* were a premonition, Schmid later faced the demolition of his own house. Cf. Schmid, letter to Améry, October 9, 1974 (DLA 86.982/4).

⁸⁰ Another crucial difference between Améry and Lefeu is, of course, the circumstances under which they survived Nazi terror: unlike Améry, Lefeu did not experience the camps.

Jean Améry's Summa: *Lefeu oder der Abbruch*

The following reading of the essay-novel's narrative development highlights those aspects that show how Améry converged on the topics of revenge and *ressentiment*. I begin with a general presentation of Lefeu's "Neinsage," which concentrates in the first two chapters, "Verfall" and "Erfolg," on his refusal to vacate his house and exhibit his art in Germany. I then turn to the fourth chapter, "Die Jasager, der Neinsager," in which Lefeu begins to examine specific reasons for his withdrawal from society, breaking the silence that surrounds his past. The third part of my investigation turns on the crucial Gaz de Lacq episode (in the fifth chapter, "Die rote Mütze"). I will address the resurgence of Lefeu's suppressed memories and his subsequent loss of language, a circumstance he had believed impossible (chapter 3, "Die Wörter und die Dinge"). Lastly, I attend to two mythical figures that accompany Lefeu after his breakdown, *Feuerreiter* and *l'oiseau de malheur*, who provoke him to take vengeance in the final chapter, "Nachflug." The goal of my reading of *Lefeu* is to show that Améry, despite his fascination with redemptive violence, finally rejects it as a means for ending injustice. *Lefeu* offered Améry the opportunity to imagine a virtual counterpoint to his own postwar reality, but to his own surprise Améry emerged as strong opponent to any valorization of violence upon completion of the essay-novel.

The Protest Against Time: Lefeu's General "Neinsage"

Among the many codes Améry employed in *Lefeu*—for instance, "Glanzverfall" symbolizing the commercialization of culture and the quick succession of fashions—Lefeu's "Neinsage" stands out as the driving impulse behind the essay-novel's narrative movement and essayistic reflection.⁸¹ The phrases "Neinsager" and

⁸¹ Lorenz considers not "Neinsage" but "Glanzverfall" (and thus Améry's cultural criticism) the overarching theme of *Lefeu*. Cf. Lorenz, *Scheitern als Ereignis*, 149. Lefeu's "Neinsage" responds to the art market, but only on the most obvious level.

“Neinsage” are not uncommon in German and were brought to prominence by Bertolt Brecht’s 1931 school opera *Der Neinsager*.⁸² In Brecht’s piece the protagonist refuses to act according to tradition, insisting on using his rationality rather than following superstitious ritual. Even in a post-ritualistic, rationalized society, “Neinsage” is for Brecht the outcome of thinking for oneself and reflecting on one’s situation, which often goes against the consensus of a blindly accepting majority. Améry first used the term “Neinsager” to characterize Herbert Marcuse, whose *Vernunft und Revolution* he reviewed in 1968, but he had long before been fascinated with the idea of someone who refuses to accept society’s “Majoritätsurteile” (389), and he modeled all of his prose protagonists as *Neinsager*.⁸³ By insisting on writing essays—as an individual reflecting “vor der Welt und gegen sie” (484)—Améry chose the appropriate form to express “Neinsage” himself.

In the beginning Lefeu’s *Neinsage* is associated with his refusal to vacate his house, accept compensation for his loss, and move into the newly built apartment complex to which he has been assigned by the city. The first chapter tells the story of Lefeu’s legal battle against “Immobilien-Paris-Seine” (294, 308). Refusing to join the majority of tenants in leaving the building, Lefeu retains a lawyer to defend his right to remain in his home, a former factory with an atmosphere of progressive decay informing much of Lefeu’s artistic work (313). Only two tenants, his fellow artists Destré and Vandamme, join Lefeu in the fight; together they write to all major newspapers (294) in the vain hope that the public will support their cause. In the subsequent chapter, Lefeu is still optimistic that he can stop the demolition; he trusts

⁸² Bertolt Brecht, *Der Jasager und Der Neinsager. Vorlagen, Fassungen, Materialien*, ed. Peter Szondi (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1996).

⁸³ Cf., e.g., Jean Améry, “Der Neinsager: Aber ist Herbert Marcuse auch die revolutionäre Führergestalt?,” *Die Zeit*, February 23, 1968. Eugen Althager is Améry’s earliest “Neinsager” (in *Die Schiffbrüchigen*). Lorenz, who has analyzed the unpublished prose fragments Améry produced in the late 1940s, concludes that all of Améry’s main characters have been “Neinsager.” Cf. Lorenz, *Scheitern als Ereignis*, 138.

that “die öffentliche Meinung (...) ihre Stimme erheben [wird]” (326). By chapters three and four, Lefeu has realized that his lawyer lacks sufficient power and the public sufficient interest to save him. Although the demolition is under way and both Destré and Vandamme have left the building (387), Lefeu remains in what are now the ruins of his home (402). Finally forced to leave, he still refuses to move into his new apartment and instead spends the nights either on the street or with his former neighbors (452). In the final pages of the novel Lefeu returns to what is left of his home to set himself on fire (478f.)

Beneath the tale of Lefeu’s battle with real-estate developers lies Améry’s critique of the judicial practice of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Rather than accept money as a form of reparations, Lefeu wants to seek justice in court, but the legal system fails him and makes adequate prosecution impossible. Moreover, the public is indifferent to the crime and uninterested in justice. Lefeu’s refusal to vacate his home is his insistence that the crime in the past has not been amended in the present and remains an open wound. The building’s ruined state attests to this wound, evoking images of a bloody wing violently ripped off of a living bird (403). The bird is generally considered—in Western and indigenous cultures alike—a symbol for the immortality of the human soul. Wings are interpreted positively as the ability to transcend earthly confinements, however, they also mark demonic forces such as the unstoppable passing of time.⁸⁴ In the context of *Lefeu*, one may argue that Lefeu’s soul is punctuated and remains a wound that the passing of time cannot heal. According to Améry’s philosophy of *ressentiments* the passing of time worsens the injury and counteracts the healing of the soul. Whether or not Améry chose deliberately the image of a bird for its symbolism is debatable. It is undeniable that he was inspired by

⁸⁴ Cf. Hope B. Werness, *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Animal Symbolism in Art* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 44f., 443.

Schmid's painting *L'oiseau de malheur*. The early mention of Lefeu's home as a bloody bird's wing introduces the motif of *Unglücksvogel*, which is of great prominence in the later part of the novel, as discussed below.

Lefeu's *Neinsage* is not limited to his refusal to leave his apartment, an understandable reaction. Less understandable is the decline of a lucrative offer to exhibit his art, whereby he refuses the very success his livelihood depends on. By the end of the first chapter, Lefeu's agent, Jacques, representing the fashionable Parisian gallery Beaumann, has established connections to a gallery in Düsseldorf that sends delegates to Lefeu's apartment to negotiate a deal (317). The German art dealers meet with Lefeu four more times in the next chapter to convince him to exhibit in Düsseldorf (326, 332, 346, 353). During these visits they present the painter with a detailed marketing strategy, which includes labeling his art as metaphysical realism (326) to guarantee the artist's success. It is possible that Lefeu briefly contemplates accepting the offer, thinking that his girlfriend Irene might benefit from his success as well (363), but in chapter four he asks Jacques to write to the German gallery to decline the offer (411). In the final chapter the representatives from Düsseldorf speak to Lefeu once more, hoping that he will revoke his decision, but despite their efforts he reiterates his refusal (452ff.).

Lefeu's *Neinsage* to success in Germany is superficially the consequence of his self-exile from the contemporary culture industry, captured by Améry's neologism "Glanzverfall." More importantly, however, Lefeu refuses to exhibit in *Germany*. Although the reader does not learn of Lefeu's Jewish background and his parents' death in the Holocaust until much later, it is obvious from the beginning that the Germans' presence is unsettling to Lefeu. His final decision not to deal with the Germans, combined with the many intertextual references to German literary

artifacts,⁸⁵ speaks to the tension that the author Améry experienced in postwar German society, a tension between attraction to and identification with German culture, and reluctance to participate in it.

Lefeu's refusal to vacate his home and his refusal to succumb to success thus both suggest forms of criticism of postwar Germany, but this is not immediately clear either to Lefeu or to the reader. Rather, Lefeu's unexamined *Neinsage* appears at first to be primarily bound to the physical symptoms of decay, which interest him for aesthetic and moral reasons.

The apartment Lefeu so vehemently defends is in a state of decline and neglect; it is populated by objects marked by different stages of decay: a dirty sink that Lefeu uses as a urinal, dirty dishes, a cracked, dirt-colored wall on which hangs a painting of the same color, a charred letter from the lawyer on top of a broken table, a dust-covered floor stained by paint, a rumpled bed with dirty sheets (291). Lefeu is himself almost indistinguishable from these objects: he is but a gray and unshaven face reflected in the mirror (*ibid.*), embedded into the house as if house and tenant were one organism: "Wir [=Lefeu and Destré] sind in diesem Haus verwurzelt. (...) Unsere Körper sind verwachsen mit den schmutzigen Tüchern; diese wiederum reichen tief in den verfaulenden Fußboden" (295). Lefeu's fascination with decay and his defense of it speak to his aesthetic concern not with conventional beauty but "Verfallsschönheit" (299), a concept based on the proposition that the process of decay reveals things that are otherwise "ungeahnt" (296). Beauty, by Lefeu's

⁸⁵ While Lefeu includes references to many icons of French culture as well—for instance to writers Paul Verlaine, Stéphane Mallarmé, Arthur Rimbaud, and painters Eugène Delacroix, and Paul Gauguin, etc.—the framework of cultural reference is decidedly German. Despite the inclusion of French phrases, literary quotations are of German origin. The only literary passage in French stems from Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*. Cf. Lorenz, *Scheitern als Ereignis*, 163. Literary German references include those to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Hölderlin, Novalis, Hugo von Hoffmannsthal, Heinrich Heine, Franz Kafka, Rainer Maria Rilke, Heinrich and Thomas Mann, Alfred Andersch, Peter Weiss, and Friederike Mayröcker.

definition, depends on differentiation that produces unexpected associations (300). The cracks in his apartment wall conjure up different Rorschach images (296) or a map of paradise (301), and they inspire him to paint said wall “ixmal” (321). Through the process of decay objects become “differenzierter, vielfältiger” (301), thereby lending themselves to aesthetic contemplation much more than what is captured by the common “Begriff des Schönen als des Bequemem, Glatten, Gesunden, Lebenskräftigen und (...) Lebensfördernden” (299). Lefeu’s refusal to accept this standard concept of beauty, which is based on the supposed supremacy of “rational expandierenden Lebens” (298), is therefore not only an aesthetic choice but also a manifestation of his rejection of a certain belief system, clearly articulated in the postwar German discourse of *Wiederaufbau*, according to which the future trumps the past for the sake of life’s expansion and rejects the old, decaying, and ugly. Lefeu’s preference for decay over newness—of “Differenzierbarkeit nicht Funktionalität” (305)—is, in the majority view, irrational because it is “aufzufassen als Negation des sich lärmend und glänzend (...) bekräftigenden, dem Wettkampf und der Selektion verschworenen Lebens” (308). His dislike for the promotion of life-enhancement does not mean that he harbors a death wish or that he negates life altogether (296). On the contrary, Lefeu’s insistence on the beauty of decay is in affirmation of life, because decay works in “Bereiche[n] des Moralischen” (299). Whereas Lefeu never explicitly states how morality figures in the phenomenon of decay, Améry defended the natural, slow process of decay against “Glanzverfall” to shield it from active demolition meant to make room for something new. Through Lefeu’s fascination with decay, Améry gives “dem Abbruch, dem Niedergang, der etwas Miserables hat (...) einen gewissen humanen (...) Wert, eine gewisse Würde.”⁸⁶ Although Lefeu himself has no

⁸⁶ Améry and Hermann, “Jean Améry im Gespräch,” 119. Améry had likewise defended the dignity of the aging process in humans. Cf. his 1968 essay collection, Améry, *Über das Altern*.

explanation for his admiration of decay, the use of the word “Selektion,” which in German almost always connotes extermination camp selections, inserts the Nazi past in *Lefeu*. Lefeu rejects life-enhancement because he has witnessed and suffered from the effects of a regime that murdered “selected” groups of the German population in the name of enhancement and purification.

Jacques speculates that Lefeu, who still paints like Kokoschka (as did Schmid)⁸⁷ and has thus failed to keep up with contemporary art (303), develops his “Verfalls-Philosophie (...) [und] Verfalls-Ästhetik” (305) with an insistence on what is old, to shield himself from the present, where, according to Jacques, Lefeu believes himself to be a “Zukurzgekommene[r]” (303) and to have been cheated out of something he thinks he deserves. In short, Jacques accuses Lefeu of being the Nietzschean man of *ressentiments* who has turned his defeat on the art market into a virtue by declaring that which is no longer in demand to be of value. In retort, Lefeu denies that his protest against newness, as manifested in his fascination with decay, is at all connected to an “Anhänglichkeit an Altes” (306), arguing that decay is trans-temporal and therefore a protest against “zeitliche(r) Phänomene” altogether (309). It is unclear how decay, which signifies transience and the passage of time, defeats temporal categories except by leaving marks of the past in the present and thus collapsing time. Decay predicts that the present, as well as the future, will have a past, too. In lieu of explanation, Lefeu simply insists that decay points “in die Zeitlosigkeit” and is thus better “als zeitfreudiges, zeituntertäniges, zeithöriges [Leben]” (309). His is a protest against the passing of time, and from the “Ressentiments” essay we know that Lefeu’s author Améry voiced the same protest in order to point to an injury in the past that society failed to acknowledge in the present. Lefeu’s valorization of decay is

⁸⁷ Cf. Améry, “Neuen Mönche,” 645.

thus intimately linked to *ressentiments*, but contrary to what Jacques had suspected, not to *ressentiments* of the Nietzschean kind.

Though Jacques can no longer accept any of Lefeu's paintings because they do not sell at Beaumann, the Düsseldorf gallerists are "entschlossen" to introduce them to the German art market with "Donnerschlag oder Fanfarenstoß" (327). Despite their offer of a large sum of money, the promise of enthusiastic headlines, and TV interviews with prominent hosts, Lefeu is not "tickled to death [sic]" (328) at the prospect of success, as Vandamme later admits he would have been (335). The second chapter explores why Lefeu refuses success, the reason for which cannot be explained "monokausal" (328) because the refusal is only one symptom of Lefeu's general "*Abwendung von der Welt*" (330). By his definition, the contemporary (Western) world is but a series of commercialized fashions from which Lefeu wants to withdraw, and so he tells his German visitors: "nein danke, ich mag nicht und ich will nicht und enfin" (331). When the Düsseldorf gallerists feign understanding for his contempt of the obsession with newness⁸⁸ and explain to him that they are interested in his art precisely because Lefeu's painting are suggestive of what has passed, he objects vehemently and dismisses any interest in the past: "Rückbesinnung wäre schlimm für mich. Das Allerschlimmste. Ich weiß von nichts. Was vergangen ist, das ist vergangen [sic], man soll es nicht wieder an den Tag kommen lassen" (331). His paintings are neither the result of "Vergangenheitssehnsucht" nor "reaktionäre[n] Ressentiments," and "die Lefeu-Erfolgsflucht [ist nicht] der neurotische Ausdruck solcher Rancune" (333). Lefeu does not lament the decline of civilization (338) as suggested by the gallerists who frame his art as a nostalgic yearning for an idealized

⁸⁸ Améry shares Lefeu's contempt. Cf. Jean Améry, "Terror der Aktualität," in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 7, Aufsätze zur Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, ed. Stephan Steiner (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2005), 11-28. This article may be key in understanding Améry's cipher "Glanz-Verfall," by which he denounces the fashion to quickly change one's opinion so that it adheres to an ever-changing public opinion, thereby betraying one's own subjectivity.

past, and his refusal to compete with contemporary artists is not the result of such nostalgia. Rather than a turn towards the past, Lefeu exclaims, his *Neinsage* is a “Weigerung gegen die Zeit” as such (349).

In two instances, in connection with decay and his rejection of success, Lefeu has denied a special interest in the past but insisted that his *Neinsage* is a protest against time altogether. Because time is mentioned in reference to contemporaneity and newness, Lefeu’s criticism of time is that it has a strong preference for one of its two counterpoints. It always predicts the future, a prediction accompanied by a promise to forget the past. This imbalance creates a value judgment by which the future figures more prominently than the past, and it is this judgment that levels all injustices, which makes time amoral. Herein lies Lefeu’s assumption that his fascination with decay is a moral protest. The concept of the present at stake in *Lefeu* is postwar Germany, and Lefeu’s insistence that his protest against time is moral in nature translates into his rejection of West German *Wiederaufbau*, a rejection that is based on moral grounds because *Wiederaufbau* levels past injustices, regardless of whether they have been amended and morally repaired.

Lefeu’s friends call his irrational protest against time a “psychopathologische Verfassung” (305). Lefeu is aware of his “krankhafte Gemütszustand” but unable to define it. Moreover, he doubts that it is a symptom of illness and describes his rejection of newness and success “kerngesund” (306). His is a protest of the individual against what the majority of his contemporaries have declared to be desirable, and he understands that in their eyes he may suffer from a mental illness. After all, he rebels against “das sich in Permanenz einwägende Gleichgewicht der Majoritätsurteile” (389), but according to “ein mit Lefeu befreundeter Schriftsteller”—Améry himself!— “[ist] die Haltung des Kranken, des Sterbenden (...) im Grunde menschlicher als der kerzengerade, aufrechte Gang” (329). Already in the “Ressentiments” essay Améry

argued that the protest against the amoral passing of time, which renders past injustices irrelevant in the future, manifests the humane and moral alternative to the belief that time heals all wounds, a belief considered healthy because it is associated with “Lebenskraft” (397). For Lefeu, the focus on living stems from altogether irrelevant “Zielvorstellung(en)” (ibid.). Hence his disregard for the “Majoritätsurteil,” in which he is not healthy, in favor of his very own “Wahrheitsurteile” (389).

Lefeu arrives at these subjective truths through relentless introspection, a process that mirrors decay’s workings of excavation and differentiation and by which he follows mnemonic chains of associations. Just as each crack in the wall leads to others, all of Lefeu’s memories intersect and draw him into deeper layers of memory, a process Lefeu identifies as painful (353), and thus he eschews following certain memories but tries to suppress them. Similar to the cracks on the wall are Irene’s blood vessels visible underneath her skin: both show “verworrenes Geäst” that throws out a dangerous net catching Lefeu’s memories (354). The descriptive entanglement of the human body with the inanimate material of its physical surroundings underlines Lefeu’s impression that he forms one organism with the decayed building.

“[M]armorierende[s] Geäst auf den Oberschenkeln und an der Wand” provoke in Lefeu a deep thoughtfulness and reflectiveness (355) that, against his will, lead to the discovery of a “klagende[s] Gesicht” on the wall (350). Much later Lefeu is able to decipher the writing on the wall, “die [=Schrift] aber nicht vorwärts verweist auf das Kommende, sondern rückwärts läuft” (429). It is all that is left from a past that “die vergehende Zeit (...) wegwischte. Nur dass freilich das schon Ausgewischte, von der reinigenden Zeit Ausgewaschene bisweilen dann doch aus dem Dämmer hervorleuchtet” (ibid.). For the bulk of the novel, Lefeu, conscious of his memories’ powerful pull, successfully keeps them at bay. Much like Améry’s writing process, Lefeu’s memory resists conscious control and breaks free through associative

movements that release “uralte, aber weggesperrte” images (496). The breaking through of memories picks up on the motif of another writing, the writing on the wall, which runs backward. This motif challenges the presumption that narrative structure necessarily relies on the notion of sequencing and temporality, traits generally shared by narratives. The writing on the wall is the essayistic thread that weaves through the novel and disrupts the temporal unidirectionality of the text.

Discovering the Root of Neinsage: Lefeu’s Breaking Silence

Even before Lefeu discovers the reasons for his *Neinsage*, he assumes it has to do with a personal experience requiring contemplation, and he therefore prioritizes introspection—“sie ist die Wahrheit des vécu” (320)—over engagement with the outside world. During the meeting with Jacques in which he requests that the agent decline the Düsseldorf offer, Lefeu explains that his *Neinsage* is not solely the rejection of the art scene, but also involves another component more difficult to detect (415):

Es lassen sich im vorliegenden Zusammenhang tatsächlich ganz verschiedene Formen der Negation erst feststellen, dann notdürftig aufklären: notdürftig, da doch der Hauptbetroffene selber nicht genau Bescheid weiß um die Kausalprozesse, die in seinem Bewusstsein sich schneiden. (404)

The episode at Gaz du Lacq brings forth the “Auflösung des Rätsels, dessen Entwirrung ich [=Lefeu] mich verweigerte” (429), but clues to the enigma are dispersed throughout the book for the reader to decipher. The first is offered in connection with Lefeu’s initial consideration of the Düsseldorf offer:

Lefeu. Das Feuer. Oder Feuermann. Aber das ist lange her, es schimmert kaum noch herein in die Mansarde sans joie. Jacques weiß nichts davon. Man könnte, wenn man nur aufgelegt wäre, daraus Trinkkapital schlagen, Deutschland ist en vogue, der läppische

Erlkönig gefällt, wo man nichts—oder nichts mehr—davon weiß, wie die Männlein und Weiblein gefällt wurden, Strich um Strich, wie die Sichel surrt und droht: zum Tod! Das hat es auch gegeben, der Täter führte den schönen Namen Börries von Münchhausen, das weiß in der Rue Roquentin niemand. Und irgendwann, aber das müsste ein guter Eingeweihter sein, den es hier weit und breit nicht gibt, könnte man die Frage zur Diskussion stellen, ob die Neigung zum Verfall von dorthier mitgebracht wurde, Erbstück einer so und so gearteten Zivilisation.
(311)

This is Lefeu's first mention of his birth name, Feuermann, a name and by extension a past of which his friends know nothing. He claims this past is of little significance for his postwar life ("Rue Roquentin," his address in Paris⁸⁹), yet his existence lacks joy ("sans joie") precisely because for Lefeu time is out of joint. He contemplates selling the story of his past to the French media, as the success of Michel Tournier's *Le Roi des aulnes* (1970, trans. *Der Erlkönig*, 1972) attests to a certain French fascination with the Third Reich,⁹⁰ a fascination based on the ignorance of mass murder, or, as Lefeu references the Nazi poet von Münchhausen in comparison with Tournier, perhaps even its tolerance. Lefeu suggests that his interest in decay (and his *Neinsage*) is the product of surviving a society that had condoned the disappearance of Feuermann, but he does not see the point in following this line of reasoning any further because there is no one who could empathetically relate to him. When Vandamme finally asks him why he knows how to speak German, Lefeu answers that he was deported from France to Germany as a forced laborer (336). He says to himself that this was not actually the case: "sondern. Sondern. Hat gar keine Bewandtnis mehr, vor dem Herrn sind tausend Jahre wie ein Tag, und einen Tag währte das Tausendjährige Reich" (338).

⁸⁹ The name of Lefeu's street implicitly refers to Sartre, whose main character in *Nausea* is named Antoine Roquentin. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea* (New York: New Direction, 2007).

⁹⁰ Améry reviewed Michel Tournier very critically, taking his *Der Erlkönig* as evidence of a renewed and dangerous fascination in France with Nazism. Cf. Jean Améry, "Ästhetizismus der Barberei. Über Michel Tourniers Roman *Der Erlkönig*," in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 5, Aufsätze zur Literatur und zum Film*, ed. Hans Höller (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2003), 174-88.

Though Vandamme does not suspect that Lefeu is German (or Jewish, for that matter), the Düsseldorf gallerists are aware of Lefeu's background (how so remains unclear). At their first meeting they ask him if he has any reservations about exhibiting in Germany, and they clearly indicate that they know he is German. They also know that he is Jewish, a knowledge they reveal by further mentioning the name of the original gallery owner with whom they are connected only "ganz fernher und auf gestörte Weise" (393):

Es könnte ja sein, dass Sie gewisse Vorbehalte, nicht Vorurteile: Vorbehalte. Deutschl. Unsere Firma hieß vor dem Kriege Meyersohn, ein Weltbegriff, in Kunstkreisen natürlich nur. (...) Also jedenfalls keine Vorbehalte. Hm, nein, kaum. Historisch gesehen, sind unter den heutigen Akzelerationsumständen dreißig Jahre gleich drei Jahrtausenden. (318)

Juxtaposed with the earlier statement on the duration of the Third Reich, this invites a suggestive inference: if postwar Germany seems to have lasted 3,000 years already, then the Nazi period, with its one-day duration ("einen Tag währte das Tausendjährige Reich," 338), shrinks in importance and becomes negligible. Lefeu implicitly endures continued victimization throughout the postwar period precisely because the German public refuses to recognize the significance of the Nazi past for its present existence.

The gallerists' are solely interested in profit, hence they want to use Lefeu's concept of *Glanzverfall* to promote his art as an avant-garde expression of a new philosophy. To avoid discomforting or alienating a German audience, they select from Lefeu's large repertoire only his landscape paintings, leaving his political art behind. They suggest that he can succeed in Germany only if he presents himself as apolitical. Moreover, the gallerists prefer to leave Lefeu's past unmentioned, for it is unmarketable in postwar Germany (327f.)

Lefeu is himself silent on the silence regarding his past; he comments instead on his girlfriend Irene's silence, broken only occasionally with "mots orduriers" (vulgar words) during sexual intercourse, that is, only with a "Transgressionsakt" (356). Her breaking of silence is a transgression, a breaking of taboos. Vis-à-vis Irene, and perhaps in reference to the German silence on his past, Lefeu ponders:

Man müsste den Pfeil eines Wortes abschießen: es könnte das träge, eben noch quallige, aber jetzt schon der Versteinerung sich entgegenwandelnde Schweigen brechen. Die Sehne gespannt, jäh losgelassen—und das Geschoß sitzt tief im Steine und macht ihn zur quellenden Wunde (355f.)

The silence surrounding him and his past is a "[g]efährliche Ruhe," which so agitates him that he, in place of the gallerists, "sich rückwärts wendet, was er doch um jeden Preis hätte vermeiden wollen" (378). In the process of turning back, Lefeu, who first considered entering "elende Kompromisse" with the Germans (342), concludes that he must turn down their offer, and that he must do so to break the silence. Perhaps the stony façade of *Wiederaufbau* behind which postwar society hides would, if Lefeu broke the taboo placed on the past, crack open to reveal an old but still open wound. Via the initial reflection on Irene's refusal to communicate reality intelligibly, Lefeu finally arrives at a new determination to speak out himself about his own past experience.

In contrast to Lefeu Jacques is identified as *Jasager*. Not only does he, like the gallerists from Düsseldorf, follow the trends of the day—first existentialism, then structuralism and psychoanalysis (391)—but he also chooses to cooperate with the Germans in spite of a past in "den miesen Regionen im Osten" (393), from which he only narrowly escaped. His background, though largely an untold story of survival in

Eastern Europe that Lefeu simply abbreviates by the phrase “eia popeia”⁹¹ (386, 391, 393), connects Jacques with Meyersohn and son (393), yet he has come to terms with history and seems unbothered by the presence of the German gallerists, who own Meyersohn’s gallery because Meyersohn and his son did not, like Jacques and Lefeu, survive Nazi persecution. When Lefeu finally dictates to Jacques his *Neinsage* to the Germans, his decision is bound to the fate of Meyersohn, which Lefeu, unlike Jacques, has not succeeded at suppressing completely.

Ich frage nur: Kann einer Dreck fressen und Gold scheißen? Er kann es nicht, mon ami Jacques, und Gott weiß, dass ich merde verschlungen habe von früh auf. Feuermann. Geschichtsdreck. (...)

Und damit sei der Entschluss gefasst. Ich diktiere, wenn Sie erlauben.

(...) Es muss ein Ende haben mit den Besuchen der Herren aus Düsseldorf, sie stören den Abbruch meiner Person und meines Hauses.

(...) Er [=Lefeu] wünscht, weiterhin so schlecht verkäuflich zu sein wie bis zur Stunde und empfiehlt sich Ihnen durch uns aufs höflichste.

Signatur. Nachschrift.

Was geschah mit Meyersohn?

Was geschah mit Meyersohn?

Und mit seinem Sohn?

Ich wiederhole: Was geschah mit Meyersohn? Und mit seinem Sohn?

[Jacques:] Aber das sind junge Leute, Lefeu, wie sollten sie eine solche Frage beantworten können? Welchen Zweck kann es überhaupt haben, die Vergangenheit aufzurühren? [Lefeu:] Aufrühren, Jacques: und schon taucht aus der Tiefe der Schmerz herauf und trübt alle Wasser.

Wir Franzosen (...) haben uns arrangiert (...), delectieren uns an dem „Erlkönig“ Michel Tourniers. (...) Aber wir beide, Jacques, dem eia popeia (...) an der Wiege gesungen wurde, und Lefeu (...), sind nicht Frankreich. (...) Frankreich ist leicht. Wir sind schwer. (...) Es ist die Nacht des Vergessens und einer Neinsage, die sowohl Leben ist wie Tod. (407, 410ff.)

⁹¹ “Eia, popeia, was raschelt im Stroh” is an old children’s song, first published in *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* in 1808, that laments extreme poverty. *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* also includes “Walte Gott Vater,” a lullaby dating back to the fourteenth century, in which the phrase “eia popeia” is frequently used. Cf. Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano, eds., *Des Knaben Wunderhorn. Alte deutsche Lieder gesammelt von A. v. Arnim und Clemens Brentano* (Berlin: v. Arnimsche Verlag, 1846). It is unclear if and how the phrase is connected to Jewish communities in Eastern Europe, which Lefeu mentions as Jacques’s place of origin.

While *Jasager* (in the plural) have reconciled themselves to the past by allowing time's passage to aid forgetting, Lefeu, the lone *Neinsager*, stands, as he says himself, "außerhalb der Geschichte" (406) and refuses to accept the passing of time, even though he does acknowledge some sort of transformation that turned the past into "Geschichtsdrück" in the present. He declines the Germans' offer because he does not want to participate in a culture of forgetting that is uninterested in learning about Meyerssohn and makes even Nazism marketable. He protests against profiting from the *merde* that history has handed him and that still contributes to his own (rather than his house's) demolition. And rather than referring abstractly to "Vergangenheit," Lefeu is ready to speak about his concrete experience of Nazi persecution, even if the process of remembering is painful and threatens his life.

The realization that his *Neinsage* is intimately linked to contemporary society's simultaneous forgetting of the Nazi crimes and the rehabilitation of the Nazis—a realization at which Lefeu arrives only once he is confronted with the gallerists from Germany, the first postwar Germans he meets, as far as the reader knows—prepares him to uncover memories of his own traumatic past.

The Return of Memory and the Subsequent Crisis of Language

The fifth chapter of the novel appears to be a complete break with the rest of the text. Aside from a few mentions of Irene and the Düsseldorf gallerists at the beginning (418), none of the three supposedly central narratives—the demolition of the building, Lefeu's interactions with the gallerists, and Irene—retain any significance here. Instead, the chapter concentrates exclusively on Jacques' car ride to Pau to attend a gallery opening, on which he is accompanied by Lefeu, and Lefeu's immediate return to Paris by train upon remembering his parents' deportation. Lefeu's determination to stir up the past was but preparation for his discovery of the truth of

his own past, which is “nicht so leicht aussprechbar” (408). This leads to his own crisis of language.

The car ride on a French “route départementale” (419), lined on both sides by rows of poplars (420) and thus reminiscent of Améry’s ride from Brussels to Breendonk,⁹² has been foreshadowed throughout the previous chapters. Irene’s poem on poplars (292, 314, 343, 358f., etc.) creates in Lefeu “die Impression einer Autofahrt über eine route départementale” (359, cf. 314). Lefeu’s subsequent painting of poplars that reach “direkt in the rostrotten Himmel” (351) combines Irene’s poplars (and the highway associated herewith) with the frequent yet subtle mention of red paint (293, 310, 324). As Lefeu works on this particular landscape painting (in which he departs from his usual subject matter much to the gallerists’ dislike because they fear that Lefeu’s red skies are reminiscent of the red sky produced by the SS massacre of Oradour-sur-Glane in 1944, cf. 351, 353), his mental image of poplars marching alongside the road calls forth the memory of a German marching song idealizing the Westerwald. This is a memory of dangerous nationalism against which he shields himself with a song of the French resistance. When this does not fend off the image of marching Germans, he destroys the composition of the painting altogether, “denn der Bildner heißt Lefeu. Lefeu” (352). By repeating his name, Lefeu reasserts his identity and interrupts the march of Germans, effectively interfering with history, at least in his imagination.

The mental associations that trouble Lefeu are often evoked by fire, real in the streets of Paris (376) and imagined in his paintings (310). Triggered by fire, these associations themselves have the destructive force of burning flames. Throughout the text, Lefeu compares associations created by words, such as Irene’s “Pappelallee,” to raging flames: “eines der brennendsten Probleme der Wörter,” he says in connection

⁹² Cf. Améry, *Jenseits*, 32.

with his *Neinsage* and Meyersohn, “ist und bleibt ihre unmittelbar und unaufhebbar wirkende assoziative Gewalt” (412), which brings about “‘Dinge’ oder, wenn man will: psychische Fakten” (413). This mechanism is mirrored on the textual level, where word associations lead to essayistic exploration. Like the “feuerwerkshaften Vorstellungsreihen” of words (361), memories too are imagined as fire and flame (cf. “aufflammende(n) Erinnerungen,” 353). Most obviously, the name Lefeu points to fire (*le feu*), but it also alludes to the deceased (*feu*) and to things on fire (*en feu*). Imagined fire infuses Lefeu’s home, “die Rue sans jolie, die Rue sans espoir, sans vouloir et sans temps,” as if it were a “magisches Symbol” (310). In the absence of joy, hope, will, and time, the reflection of fire saturates his home with memories. Lefeu’s memories enter his consciousness like the conflagrations of which they are reminiscent, that is, of the Holocaust as symbolized by extermination camp chimneys and crematoria. As magic symbols, fires of the Holocaust continue to flare in Lefeu’s mind and exist as psychic fact determining his experience of postwar society.

The associative cluster of highways, poplars, red paint, fire, and, at its center, Lefeu’s past tied to the history of Nazi Germany, has thus been underlying the text all along and surfaces in chapter five, where it conjures up in Lefeu “den ganzen Komplex, den ich vergrub in die letzten mir noch erreichbaren Tiefen meiner Existenz” (426). En route to Pau, Jacques and Lefeu pass Lacq, one of the world’s largest producers of sulfur. From the natural gas pool surrounding Lacq flames diffuse into the sky, coloring it as red as Lefeu imagined it in his paintings. Stirred by this visual stimulus combining the color of sulfur (yellow, evoking the yellow star of David) with flames is a memory that Lefeu attempts to chase away by demanding that Jacques tell him their precise location, hoping that Jacques’ repetition of “C’est lou Gaz de Lacq” will anchor Lefeu in the present reality. Jacques’ attempt to soothe his

friend fails; for the first time, Lefeu imagines the deportation of his parents and their death in Nazi extermination camps:

Sehen Sie den Himmel? So habe ich ihn hundertmal gemalt: rot. Und so sehe ich ihn zum erstenmal. Wo sind wir hingeraten? Das ist nicht Pau, da findet keine Vernissage statt (...), da ist der schwarzrote, aber mit jedem Kilometer, den Ihre Schaltbrett klickend aufzeigt, röter werdende Himmel. Jacques, wo sind wir? C'est lou Gaz de Lacq, sagen die einheimischen Bauern (...). C'est lou Gaz de Lacq. Lacq: Gemeinde im Département Basses-Pyrénées, am Ufer des Gave de Pau, 700 Hektar, bedeutende Naturgasvorkommen, Pipelines nach zahlreichen Regionen, Schwefelproduktion. Aus Schwarz ward Rot, aus Rot wird Blau: da stechen Flammen in den winterlichen Nachthimmel, Jacques. C'est lou Gaz de Lacq. Da erleuchten sie jählings die Hügel und Wiesen und wehenden Pappeln, Jacques, halten Sie an! C'est lou Gaz de Lacq. Blitze aus der Erdentiefe. Feuer aus den Eingeweiden des Bodens. Der ganze Himmel flackert jetzt bläulich. Lacq: Gemeinde im Département Basses-Pyrénées, bedeutende Naturgasvorkommen. Es ist ein ziemlich weitläufiger Industriekomplex, wir haben ihn bald hinter uns, dann sind es nach Pau, Centre, Hotel Henri IV, vielleicht zwanzig Minuten. Halten Sie an: *ich erinnere mich*. Feuermann, Stuttgart. Stiefelfüße, schwer aufgesetzt. Gepolter und Gelächter im Korridor. Raus mit euch—oder so. So oder anders muss das gewesen sein. Eilige Hände in Schränken und Laden, das Nötigste wird mitgenommen, aber was ist das Nötigste? So oder anders. Vielleicht auch Schluchzen einer alten Frau und bebende Finger, die nach einem EK I suchen. Züge: Räder müssen rollen für den Sieg, unnötiges Reisen verlängert den Krieg. Nötige Reisen ostwärts, unerlässliche Fahrten durch Tage und Nächte, deren Ziel die Flammen sind. C'est lou Gaz de Lacq. (423f., emphasis in original)

Lefeu repeats “*ich erinnere mich*” thrice more. Even though his memory is late returning, it does so “um so drangvoller” (428). Since he was absent from his parents’ house, his memories of their arrest and deportation do not stem from concrete experience, but from his imagination, but they exist as psychic facts nonetheless. Lefeu did not witness their murders nor those of so many more, and he is overcome with survivor guilt: “Ein furchtbar großer Pluralkreis: sie. Eux. Les autres. Und wenn

ich rede, ich, im Singular, dann ist mein Geplapper das Zeugnis eines unbegreiflichen Fehlgeschicks” (429).

In the earlier chapters Lefeu repeatedly attests to his faith in the capacity of language to communicate reality, and he defends the “Kommunikationstauglichkeit” of language against Irene’s “Geplapper” (314) derived from the merely fashionable but to Lefeu untenable belief that language stands as autonomous entity, separated entirely from social reality (356f.). Her “Geplapper”—a poetics conceived of chains of phonetically similar but semantically unconnected words that together hold no meaning—had reached “das Limit” (361) and were “Weltverleumdung” (356). As a neo-positivist (326) and an admirer of the early “Herr[n] Ludwig Wittgenstein” (368), Lefeu believes firmly, “[d]ie Sprache gibt wieder, was in der Welt, die alles, was der Fall ist, der Fall ist: nicht weniger und nicht mehr” (367). Lefeu confronts Irene’s “zerhämmerte(n) Sprachtrümmer(n)” with his own faith in Wittgenstein, whose early work, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, taught him to verify the world through language so as to remain “am Sinn des Satzes haften” (292).⁹³ He lectures Irene that Wittgenstein comprehended both world and language until “er aber nicht mehr begriff und weiter begreifen wollte”: when Wittgenstein renounced his early philosophy and uttered “das Unbegreifliche”—namely that language does not necessarily reflect the world but is composed mainly of language games independent of the social world—he lost “alle drei: sich selbst, die Sprache, die Welt” (367).⁹⁴ Though Lefeu recognizes the fundamental difficulty of translating reality, including images (325) and

⁹³ Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden (London, New York: Routledge, 1996). Wittgenstein asserted that language, by the sense its sentences conveyed, reflected the world in a logical way. The sense of a sentence was the result of an arrangement of names that correspond to objects in the world, and the specific arrangement within the sentence reflects a possible arrangement of objects in the world.

⁹⁴ Wittgenstein renounced the language philosophy of the *Tractatus* in his posthumously published work. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958).

“psychische Fakten” (413), into language, he insists that this “Übersetzungsakt(es)” is possible because it is absolutely necessary (325).

Faced with his past in the vision of the gas flames in Lacq, however, Lefeu’s own speech becomes “Geplapper.” Burdened by the knowledge of his parents’ murder, he struggles to put into words these images of their deportation; consequently his previously firm belief in the precision of referential language and the communicability of reality is radically shaken. Both prosaic-documentary and poetic language fall short of articulating his parents’ “Erlebnisfaktum” in its entirety, even though they convey meaning and have been used with such frequency that their distinct vocabularies, like “verrecken” (429) or “ein Grab in den Lüften,” are “vollkommen ausgelaugt” (424). Lefeu directly references Paul Celan, whose poem “Die Todesfuge”⁹⁵ shows such “Impotenz vor der Wirklichkeit” (425) that it is “nichts wert” (427). Words are not adequate “um Zeugnis abzulegen” (425f.), and Lefeu sees no choice but “auf die Aussage zu verzichten” (424). This is not an abdication of language but a recourse to something other than referential language, perhaps captured in “Geplapper.” “Geplapper” is, beyond Lefeu’s name for a type of senseless speech, a near anagram of “Pappel” and thus corresponds to the associative cluster that led Lefeu to imagine his parents’ murder in the first place. He begins several times to tell of his parents’ arrest, but each time he pauses to correct himself and begins anew, growing more dissatisfied with each attempt. Finally, he returns to and accepts Celan’s “Gräber [im] Himmel, ich komme nicht los von den Wortstauungen, die mir die Wirklichkeit verstellen” (427). Although his parents’ experience is not fully communicable, Lefeu must resist the urge to remain silent, because to do so would amount to concealing their past: “Und doch hieße schweigen, verschweigen. Ich habe

⁹⁵ Cf. “ein Grab in den Lüften,” “ein Grab in den Wolken,” “ein Grab in der Luft.” Paul Celan, “Die Todesfuge,” in *Die Niemandsrose, Sprachgitter* (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 2001).

verschwiegen durch Jahr und Tag,” but the memory of his parents suddenly “fordert meine Rede heraus, die falsch ist” (ibid.). Lefeu posits the defeat of language before a traumatic reality, and yet he demands to speak up, even at the risk of distorting experience. The duty to speak of the past exceeds language’s inadequacy to the task, and furthermore it overrides the tormenting “Gefühlsverdichtung” suffered by the victim of traumatic experience, who hopelessly struggles to resolve the contradiction of being unable to testify to it, all the while challenged by the crushing necessity to do just that (428).

After the Lacq episode Lefeu partly recants his belief in referential language because of his recollection; in his memory he bore witness to the loss of himself, language and the world. He seeks forgiveness from Irene: “Längst bin ich mir nicht so sicher des Sinnes der Sätze, meine Freundin, muss manches dir abbitten. Pappelallee, zum Beispiel” (459). The reference to Irene’s poplar poem evokes the entire complex of victimization which he and his parents suffered, and of which Irene was aware all along. Lefeu’s demolition of language occurs in light of the recognition that there exists “keine gemeinsame Sprache von (...) verdinglichender Betrachtungsweise und subjektiver Evidenz” (500). His subjective evidence is that history ended with graves in the air and that he cannot survive his survival: for this truth, there are no sentences whose sense is extrinsically verifiable. Subjective evidence—experience and memory—remains beyond the grasp of neo-positivist language theories.

Lefeu’s linguistic breakdown at Gaz de Lacq is not his first. Shortly after asserting the capacity of language to articulate anything, language fails Lefeu as he speaks to the Düsseldorf gallerists, who have just alluded to a possible emotional conflict that exhibiting in Germany may cause him. Language fails him precisely at the moment in which he affirms its infallibility and, more importantly, in connection to Germany and the renewed national pride of its inhabitants: “Deutschl... Man kann

darüber spr. Über alles” (alluding to the first stanza of Germany’s national anthem, “Deutschland, Deutschland über alles,” which, since 1945, is no longer sung; 318). Lefeu reflects on his difficulties to communicate with the gallerists, but while he searches for rational arguments, he stops mid-sentence at the remembrance of his own name: “Ihr Vokabular und ihre Syntax gehören dieser Zeit und ihrem Lande an, während ich selbst. Feuermann. Zu lange her” (332). There are in fact several instances where Lefeu’s language breaks prematurely, either when speaking directly to the gallerists or talking about them or about Germany. Taking a page from the “Ressentiments” essay, I would contend that Lefeu and the Germans cannot communicate as long as they remain invested in temporally distinct planes (of past and future) and therefore fail to overcome their status as *Gegenmenschen*. Although the gallerists reach out for Lefeu, they cannot bridge the gulf between them; they come “von weit her, sehr weit her, wenn Sie wüssten, *wie* weit her, das sind Strecken, über die keine Autobahn führt” (347). The real reason for Lefeu’s inability to communicate properly with the Germans lies not only in the language’s change in syntax, but also in their conflicting understanding of their shared pasts. While the mention of autobahn seems to refer to distance in space rather than in time, it also involves a temporal dimension, as the construction of German autobahns rapidly accelerated after Hitler’s rise to power in 1933. Where many Germans might consider the autobahn system a successful public works project that significantly decreased unemployment in Germany during the thirties, others, including Lefeu, might foreground the autobahn system’s other roles, namely those in the service of military logistical planning of war and genocide.

From the Void of Referential Language: Feuerreiter and l’Oiseau de Malheur

Following their defeat in the war, the Germans—"Volk und Wagen im Gewühle"—returned "von all dem Graus [und] machten sich emsig an den Wiederaufbau" without any memory of their crimes and those who had suffered from them (431). Part of the passage just quoted is taken from the revised 1841 version of Eduard Mörike's poem "Der Feuerreiter" (1824), and it is the figure of *Feuerreiter* that haunts Lefeu on his return from Pau and seeds the idea of avenging his parents.⁹⁶ According to tradition, *Feuerreiter*, who wears a red cap to warn the populace of an outbreak of fire, is Swabian (like Lefeu) and burns to death (like Lefeu's parents but unlike Lefeu himself). *Feuerreiter*'s death is marked in the poem by the line "Husch! da fällt's in Asche ab,"⁹⁷ a line Lefeu repeats several times in reference to his parents' murder.

The original version of the poem portrays an heroic *Feuerreiter* who sets out to extinguish fire. Mörike's revision of the poem holds a certain amount of ambivalence, for *Feuerreiter* is now depicted as smirking while conjuring "freventlich die Glut." The revision injects the idea of arson into the poem. At least this is how Améry must have read the poem, for in the *Lefeu* proposal he associated "des Feuerreiters 'rote Mütze'" with "Brandstiftung."⁹⁸

Améry quotes from "Der Feuerreiter" extensively in *Lefeu*,⁹⁹ beginning with Lefeu's ride through Lacq, where the painter first imagines seeing the red cap. With the memory of this mythical (430) figure of *Feuerreiter*, Lefeu enters a system of

⁹⁶ "Volk und Wagen im Gewühle // Kehren heim von all dem Graus," Eduard Mörike, "Der Feuerreiter," in *Deutsche Gedichte*, ed. Benno von Wiese (Berlin: Cornelsen, 1993), 407-08. The Améry *Werke* edition includes the original 1824 version of Mörike's poem, which is missing these lines. Eduard Mörike, "Der Feuerreiter," in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 1, Die Schiffbrüchigen, Lefeu oder Der Abbruch*, ed. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2007), 660-661.

⁹⁷ Stanza IV, line seven of the original version. Line seven in stanza V of the revised version reads: "Husch! da fällt die Asche ab." For the folklore of *Feuerreiter*, cf. Rainer Pohl, "Zur Textgeschichte von Eduard Mörikes 'Feuerreiter'," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 85 (1966), 223-40.

⁹⁸ Améry, "Lefeu oder der Abbruch. Konzept," 656.

⁹⁹ With the exception of the line "Husch! da fällt's in Asche ab," which is from Mörike's original (1824) version of the poem, Améry quotes from the revised (1841) version.

cultural references that continue to connect him to the *Heimat* from which he was expelled, on the one hand, and which is reminiscent of Nazi rhetoric, on the other:

Die Rote Mütze. Heimsuchung, Heimholung. Es ging ja irgendwo im Schwäbischen vor sich, man sah ihn grinsen vom Dachgestühl, freventlich die Glut besprechen und erblickte in der gleichen Region viel später die Männer, die anhielten vor den Häusern und die dem Verrecken Versprochenen heraus- und davon schleppten. (...) Ich erinnere mich. (430f.)

With the cultural “Heimholung,” which also carries shades of the Nazi initiative *Heim ins Reich*,¹⁰⁰ Lefeu recognizes that he too had been destined (by the Nazis) to be murdered, and this recognition leads to the realization that his *Neinsage* follows not only from his parents’ murder but also from the arbitrariness of his own survival:

Husch, da fiel’s in Asche ab. Ich hätte dort und damals—es begann im Schwäbischen und endete im Osten—mich recken müssen und nicht mich räkeln zwischen den Schenkeln Irenes. Husch, ich aber überstand, das ist der niederträchtigste Zufall ohne Notwendigkeit; Zufall entgegen der Notwendigkeit. Ich sagte nein, ins Allgemeinste hin, ohne zu wissen, dass dies die uneinholbar verspätete Jasage zum Husch war: ich fiel nicht in Asche ab, damit waren alle Türen zugefallen. (...) So kam ich auch meinem Nein auf seine erste, verwehte Spur. (431f.)

Lefeu’s *Neinsage* to his participation in postwar society is a consequence of the Nazis’ proclamation of his death sentence, from which he was inexplicably spared but which he belatedly accepts. Because Feuermann is gone, Lefeu ought not remain:

“Feuermann gibt es nicht mehr, darum sollte es Lefeu nicht geben. Die Logik ist unangreifbar” (435).

Immediately upon drawing this conclusion, Lefeu leaves Jacques to return to Paris. *Feuerreiter*, who accompanies Lefeu, replaces “die Ohnmacht der Sprache” (432) and whispers into Lefeu’s ear that where there is no word, there must be deed

¹⁰⁰ *Heim ins Reich* referred to a Nazi policy to encourage foreign nationals of German descent to “Germanize” their regions and bring them “home” to the *Reich*. The initiative went hand in hand with ethnic cleansing of areas intended to be part of “Greater Germany.”

(468). Lefeu imagines the deed that seems most appropriate for *Feuerreiter* (and Feuermann), arson. On the train ride to Paris—a trip he has made before, after his flight from the prison in Gurs (where both Schmid and Améry had been incarcerated, 435)—he begins plotting to set Paris aflame (441).

Seen in retrospect, the idea of arson was not introduced with *Feuerreiter* but permeated the text from the beginning. Lefeu's red skies and horizons speak to fire, and the painter recalls admiringly the arsonist who burnt down a Paris drugstore, in Lefeu's interpretation thereby protesting against the "cool jazz dieser Zeit" (376). Once *Feuerreiter* appears to Lefeu in Lacq, he too is imagined as posing his *Neinsage* against "die kalten elektrischen Feuer des Glanz-Verfalls" by means of arson (sic, 436). Returning to Paris, Lefeu imagines himself as arsonist, a picture captured by the phrases "Benzinkanister. Leise Tritte durch die Korridore des Neubaus. Ein paar Schwefelhölzer" (441). He repeats these phrases almost as a mantra (468, 475). He imagines the trial that follows his arrest, where it is his defense lawyer who will be able at last to describe what happened to Lefeu's parents, and who does so as he appeals to the court to forgive Lefeu's crime:

Und schließlich wollen wir nicht vergessen, dass der Angeklagte erfahren musste, seine gesamte Familie, namentlich aber die greisen Eltern, seien der teutonischen Barbarei zum Opfer gefallen: sie wurden, wie manche französische Bürger auch, im Osten des damaligen deutschen Reiches durch Zufuhr von Gas erstickt und danach in den berühmten Krematorien verbrannt. (446f.)

Resorting thus to imagined legalistic rhetoric to narrate "unleugbar Tatbestände" with "Eindeutigkeit" (315), Lefeu appears to have rediscovered his faith in the power of language. Indeed, *Feuerreiter* is gone, at least for the moment, once Lefeu reaches Paris (447).

Another companion besides *Feuerreiter* links Lefeu to his past and makes the *Jasage* impossible: *l'oiseau de malheur*. Much to the initial excitement of Jacques and the German gallerists (371), Lefeu began work on a new painting depicting a creature at once man and bird, with a nose that “ragt als Schnabel feindselig in die feindliche Welt” (369). Lefeu identifies both his home and himself with the bird, an *oiseau de malheur*, or *Unglücksvogel*, not because it brings bad luck (as *Feuerreiter* does) but because it is affected by misfortune. The ruined building, of which just one wing remains, reminds Lefeu of the bloody wing violently ripped from a bird’s body, and he paints *l'oiseau de malheur* in remembrance of its death struggle (403). Moreover, he is the bird; his is the “scharfschnabelige[r] Vogelkopf” (403, cf. 436), his is the “vorgereckte Schnabelnase” (418). The shape of his nose not only reveals his resemblance to the bird but links him also to Meyersohn, so that he imagines the Düsseldorf gallerists remarking to him that “der scharfe Krummschnabel (...) jene Nase [ist], an der Meyersohn und Sohn einen der Ihren erkannt hätten” (452).¹⁰¹ Although at first eager to obtain the painting, the gallerists lose their interest once Lefeu tells them about the bird, whose “schlechte(n) Stunden (...) vielleicht schon vorgezeichnet [waren], als er aus dem Ei kroch, irgendwo im Schwäbischen (...), denn er ist ein deutscher Vogel, das muss auch einmal klar ausgesprochen werden” (453). At Lefeu’s insistence that he is the *oiseau de malheur* and that his misfortune is linked to his birth in Germany, the gallerists from Düsseldorf turn the painting down, “schweigen betreten (...) mit einer Spur von Ungeduld” (ibid.). The Germans do not react to Lefeu’s indirect accusation, and he becomes more direct, telling them of his

¹⁰¹ Maria Lassmann interprets this scene differently. She reads the capitalized possessive pronoun not as an imagined dialogue between Lefeu and the gallerists in which the Germans speak, but understands the sentence spoken by Lefeu in address to the gallerists: in her view the Germans are, like Lefeu, Jewish. I disagree with this reading. Cf. Maria Lassmann, “Vom Gedächtnis des Körpers. Überlegungen zur Gestaltung von Jean Améry’s Roman-Essay *Lefeu oder der Abbruch*,” *Germanistische Mitteilungen* 63 (2006), 7-20, here 14n22.

expulsion from Swabia and the loss of his *Heimat*. Despite searching for a new home, he has existed since then as “Herr Ohneland,” while the Germans walk about “lastlos mit hübschen Schiurlaub-Gesten,” pretending not to know of any “Unglücksvögel(n)” (454). For the second time, the Germans refuse to engage with Lefeu’s appeal to speak of his past.¹⁰²

In his imagination Lefeu travels the Paris skies as *l’oiseau de malheur* without knowing his destination or the pathways that could lead to it. “[I]n den Lüften [gibt es] keine sichtbaren Wege oder Pfade” (458), only Celan’s graves to which Lefeu sees himself destined. Above the city—among the graves—Lefeu meditates on his “Unglück” (459), which he describes as “der schwarze Kern, aus dem alle Schwärzen meines Daseins strahlenförmig sich in die Welt vorantreiben” (474). Although Lefeu cautions that the term “Unglück,” just like the expression “[m]ein Herz ist schwer,” which he uses in reference to his misfortune (467, cf. 479), is a “mythische[r],” imprecise term loaded with clichés (457, cf. 466f.), he insists on using it, because any explanation of causality betrays his “vécu” (467), the point “in dem die existentiellen Fakten sich verdichten” (475). He is not helped by causal explanations for historical events but demands the Germans’ acknowledgment of his *Unglück*, which, for Lefeu, has mythic proportions and thus resists historical analysis.

The images of *l’oiseau de malheur* and *Feuerreiter* occasionally blur and blend, and then *Feuerreiter* demands of the bird—of *Unglücksvogel* Lefeu—to effect the

Aufhebung der Stuttgarter Schmachstunde (zitternde Hände kramten nach einem EK I, über das der Büttel nur die Achseln zuckte) und Auslöschung eines schmähhlichen Überstehens. (...) Da klappern die

¹⁰² In several places throughout the novel, Améry references his *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* essay “Wieviel Heimat braucht der Mensch?” directly. Elsewhere Lefeu cites from the text verbatim (*Lefeu*, 445).

Hufe und wiehern in die Nacht die Gelächter des Zornes, denn jetzt soll die Untat ausgelöscht werden durch die Untat. (437)

Feuerreiter calls on Lefeu to avenge his parents' deportation and to end his own survivorship of persecution: he demands the deed (*Tat*) that undoes the original crime (*Un-Tat*), but which itself is a new crime (*Untat*). *Feuerreiter* in effect calls for violent revenge, the concept of which author Améry had rejected in "Ressentiments." Lefeu does not finish his painting of the bird, and he leaves the incomplete work with Jacques, to whom he explains that he has to abandon the bird for something "Bedeutenderes" (468), ostensibly another painting, called "Paris brûle. Ich habe so oft rote Himmel gemalt, dass ich nun endlich einmal Flammen [sic]. Es hängt dies zusammen, Jacques, mit meinem Unglück, gegen das ich endlich aufstehe... Nach so vielen Wahrheiten endlich einmal die letzte Wahrheit: ihr Name sei Tat" (468). He repeats his plans to Vandamme and adds as explanation a confession of his true background:

Ich komme von dorthier, da haben Sie die Wahrheit, die ich verschwieg, weil ich mich doppelt schämte: wollte nicht Vertreiber, Vernichter, nicht Vertriebener, Vernichteter sein in unserem Kreise, machte Lefeu aus Feuermann, Feuermann, Feyermann. Ja, die Stunden der großen Feyern und großen Feuer sind da. Eine neue Arbeit: Paris brûle. Il brûle et ich brülle. (...) Es wird nicht ganz leicht sein, das heulende Gebrüll ins Optische zu übertragen, doch traue ich mir mehr zu als je zuvor, da ich ja den schwarzen Kern entdeckte: mein Unglück. Und bin besonnen, es zurückzunehmen. Weiß nicht wie. Habe so meine Pläne, die freilich, kaum dass sie gefasst sind, mir entgleiten. Denn es kommt nach so vielen Wahrheiten die letzte Wahrheit: ihr Name sei Tat. Der Unglücksvogel ist beendet, das neue Werk Paris brûle wird begonnen. Es ist zu malen mit großen Pinselstricken, so als schritte einer weit aus mit der Hand, als spränge oder sprengte er voran, gleich dem Feuerreiter, die Bewegungen kommen direkt aus dem Schultergelenk. (475)

With Lefeu's rediscovery of his *Unglück*, which for the author Améry is physically located in his shoulders that tore while he was tortured by the Nazis, he plans the deed:

while he is shouting (*brüllen*), Paris has to burn (*brûler*). Only through action does Lefeu stand up against his *Unglück* (468), which awaits, “dass die Flammen es auslöschen” (475).

Lefeu returns to the ruin of his former home to finish the painting. Equipped with knowledge of his past, he brings to his painting a fervor that seems to flow “direkt aus dem Schultergelenk, besser und leichter als zuvor” (477). Along with the red sky and the gray city of Paris, Lefeu now also paints *Feuerreiter*, whose red cap shares the sky with *l’oiseau de malheur* (477f.). New to the composition are “tief in der Ecke drunten, durch gelbe Flecken verschandelt, die schon Verbrannten, deretwegen das Schultergelenk sich regt. Ein Bart wird erkennbar, gespreizte Angst und Reckverreckfinger (...) Reck-Verreckfinger” (ibid.). Yellow paint, scarcely used before (“ein einzelnes gelbes Licht,” 310; “ein geisterhaft gelbes Licht,” 324), now figures consciously in Lefeu’s painting as symbol of the memory of those murdered in extermination camps, the carriers of the yellow star of David that marked them as Jews. Améry’s shoulder has become the shoulder of the painter who translates into image the writer’s missing words on Jewish victims of the Holocaust, effectively substituting non-referential language when referential language failed the author.

But the result is not satisfactory. Lefeu fears that “Monsieur Beaumann oder die Herren aus Düsseldorf” will distort the truth as “surrealistische(r) Phantastik” (478). The painting must be destroyed to prevent that the “Stunde der Wahrheit” be degraded by commercial success (ibid.). Lefeu sets it on fire without taking precautions against spilling gasoline on himself. It is unclear whether or not Lefeu intends to immolate himself with the painting and thus wants to commit suicide. Regardless of his intentions, someone discovers him and calls an ambulance:

Ich bin so gut wie unverletzt, nur ist mir sterbensübel. (...) Das Bild ist hin, Paris brûle. Und die Hose nur leicht angekohlt, es ist so gut wie nichts. Nur übel ist mir. (...) Ich bin ganz heil, bis auf die Übelkeit.

Heil! sage ich. Heil! Heil! Wie schnell das geht, so eine fliegende Ambulanz. Il n'est pas blessé, absolument pas. C'est plutôt le cœur, le cœur qui flanche. Le cœur ?

Das Herz? Ich ahnte es. Es war zu schwer. Et maintenant il flanche. C'est ça, Docteur ?

Oui, restez tranquille. (479)

Lefeu's repeated affirmation that he is "heil" (safe and unharmed) is unconvincing and instead reminiscent of the Hitler salute. With the diagnosis that his heart is failing, *Lefeu* ends: against all clichés of a broken heart, Lefeu's heart carried too heavy a burden ("Mein Herz ist schwer," 377, 467), and he dies of heart failure.¹⁰³ Both Dagmar Lorenz and Irene Heidelberger-Leonard argue for reading *Lefeu oder Der Abbruch* from the perspective of the dying Lefeu, merely remembering the events leading up to his end.¹⁰⁴ This reading is not altogether compatible with the observation that the ride through Lacq and the return of Lefeu's memory provide too sharp a break between the demolition/success narrative and his ultimate decision to destroy himself. Given the anticipation of arson, Lefeu's suicide, if it is indeed suicide, is surprising and suggests a link between redemptive violence and self-destruction, which I explore in the following section.

"Mein Aufstand gegen mein Unglück": The Issue of Redemptive Violence

Revisited

Lefeu arrives at the necessity of action through the recognition that, despite his initial confidence in the capacity of language to communicate reality, his *Unglück* is intensified by others' intentional silence as well as his own doubts regarding referential language. He is the *Unglücksvogel* because he fell victim to the Nazis, and although he survived persecution, he was one of very few to do so. His past

¹⁰³ Heidelberger-Leonard proposes to read *Lefeu* as narrated by a dying Lefeu who remembers the demolition and the drive to Pau in retrospect. Cf. Heidelberger-Leonard, "Nachwort [*Lefeu*]," 681.

¹⁰⁴ Lorenz, *Scheitern als Ereignis*, 175. Cf. Heidelberger-Leonard, "Nachwort [*Lefeu*]," 681.

Unglück—the murder of his parents, Meyersohn and Sohn and millions more—extends into the present, where Lefeu is burdened with survivors’ guilt and has no opportunity to work through his past in social relations with others because an impenetrable silence surrounds it. Once Lefeu links his present protest—his *Neinsage* manifested in refusal to succeed, in fascination with decay, and in insistence on living in an uninhabitable building—to his past, he has the desire to commit a radical act beyond quiet passivity, namely that of active violence. He seeks the renewal of the past conflict through revenge; he wants to balance violence with redemptive violence.

The issue of redemptive violence took on such importance to Améry that it transformed the entire *Lefeu* project, which acquired an “objektiv-gesellschaftskritischen Charakter,” as Améry writes in the epilogue (494). There he states that during the process of writing, which had all along been influenced by questions of violence (496), he finally concluded that redemptive violence, a term he uses synonymously with Sartre’s revolutionary violence, was not the key to ending injustice. Instead, its bloody results negated “jede Philosophie der Gewalt” (496, 494f.). With *Lefeu*, Améry continues, he revised his earlier ideas on violence—“alte, vertraute, ja geliebte Vorstellungen”—and broke with Sartre as a consequence (ibid.).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Améry agrees with Wolfram Schütte, who views *Lefeu* as Améry’s departure from Sartre. Cf. Améry, letter to Schütte, May 14, 1974 (DLA 81.1571/3). Early on Améry had been strongly influenced by Sartrean existentialism, and for decades he considered Sartre his intellectual father. He wrote many reviews, articles, and essays on Sartre; among the more important are: Jean Améry, “Der Existentialismus in Frankreich,” in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 6, Aufsätze zur Philosophie*, ed. Gerhard Scheit (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2004), 11-17 (1945); Jean Améry, “In die Welt geworfen. Jean Paul Sartre,” in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 4, Charles Bovary, Landarzt*, ed. Hanjo Kesting (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2006), 189-97, (1955), Jean Améry, “Jean-Paul Sartres Engagement,” in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 6, Aufsätze zur Philosophie*, ed. Gerhard Scheit (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2004), 47-67 (1968). First signs of a departure from Sartre appear in the 1971 essay “Existenzsorgen,” in: Améry, *Unmeisterliche Wanderjahre*, 268-294. Améry made his final break with Sartre in 1974, cf. Jean Améry, “Sartre: Größe und Scheitern,” in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 4, Charles Bovary, Landarzt*, ed. Hanjo Kesting (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2006), 238-66 (1974). Améry most obviously dissented from Sartre by writing a novel-essay in which he corrected Sartre’s reading of Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary: L’Idiot de la famille* (1971). Cf. Améry, *Charles Bovary, Landarzt*.

This revision is obvious in the text, where, for example, Lefeu imagines arson in several different ways. Before meeting Feuerreiter and in connection with the Nazi past, he already mentions the burning of Paris (“Paris brûlera. Paris schmorera,” 409, cf. 400). On his way back from Lacq, he plans to burn only newly-built apartment buildings (441). He eventually sets a fire while in the remains of his building (478f.), ostensibly to kill himself, but instead of self-immolation he burns the painting “Paris brûle” (479). Lefeu does not burn down Paris; he abstains from avenging himself through violence against his exterior world, but sets himself and his creation alight (495).

In the abstract to *Lefeu* Améry anticipated distancing himself from redemptive violence and thereby Sartre, its supposed intellectual father. Améry identified as the main “*geistige Problematik*” of chapter five (the Gaz de Lacq episode and subsequent return to Paris) the “Sinn und Widersinn der aus luzider Neinsage und (gleichfalls luzidem) Ressentiment resultierenden Violenz,” which promises at first to be the “letzte[r] Ausweg des ver-gewaltigten [sic] Menschen.”¹⁰⁶ Améry planned for Lefeu to consider avenging his parents’ deaths before coming to the conclusion that revenge is “sinnlos,” and the issue of violence an intellectual and political “Grenzbegriff, aber keine Maxime.”¹⁰⁷

In the proposal Améry planned Lefeu’s submission to the silence surrounding his individual *Unglück* for the final chapter, originally titled “Kapitulation.” The reader loses sight of Lefeu just as he has surrendered: “dann verlieren wir ihn [=Lefeu] aus den Augen.”¹⁰⁸ The last chapter is the only one whose title Améry changed from

For a concise but insightful overview of Améry’s engagement with existentialism, cf. Sylvia Weiler, “Jean Améry. Begründer der deutschsprachigen Shoah-Literatur?,” *Études Germaniques* 59, no. 2 (2004), 377-96. See also Hanjo Kesting, “Nachwort (zu *Charles Bovary*),” in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 4, Charles Bovary, Landarzt*, ed. Hanjo Kesting (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2006), 339-402, here 350-366.

¹⁰⁶ Améry, “Lefeu oder der Abbruch. Konzept,” 657.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 657f.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 659.

its provisional title: it became “Nachtflug” in the final version. Lefeu does not submit to the Germans’ silence, but continually questions his *Unglück* even after having abandoned the idea of revenge. It also speaks to Lefeu’s change of attitude regarding language, which he continues to use despite his difficulties engaging it.

In one of the most important essayistic passages in the book, Lefeu reflects on violence and revenge, taking as his point of departure not his parents’ murder but his own violation while imprisoned in Gurs (440). The passage is strikingly similar to Améry’s 1966 meditation on returning the blow. In response to the physical mutilation caused by the blow, and to mental scarring inflicted by abuse in general, Lefeu contemplates, it is the body that wants to strike back with violent, physical force.

[A]uf den Schlag, den körperlichen oder seelischen, will der Leib den Gegenschlag versetzen. Gegengewalt ist (...) der letzte Ausweg, den der vergewaltigte Mensch sich sucht. Hierin ist der sakrale Urgrund einer jeden Vorstellung von Rache zu sehen: in dieser körperlichen Unruhe, dieser Gleichgewichtsstörung, die beide erst nach dem vollzogenen Akt der Vergeltung gleich gehoben werden und zur Befriedung gelangen. (438)

Even though the impulse for physical revenge is natural, he continues, acting on it is unacceptable, for it creates further violence, leading in turn to new injury demanding its own vengeance:

Dass dergleichen [=Vergeltung] keine gesellschaftlich-politische Maxime sein kann, ist klar, da jeder Gegenschlag ein Schlag für sich ist, der seinerseits wieder vergeltend-reaktives Verhalten forderte, so dass die Geschichte am Ende nichts wäre als eine unzerreißbare Kette von Taten-Untaten. (Ibid.)

Society introduced jurisprudence to protect itself from such an outcome and, even with secularization, kept the taboo on revenge firmly established by Christianity. Though the wound he received in Gurs in 1940 is still open after more than thirty years (440), and though his urge to return the blow stems from a moral sense of “Gerechtigkeit,”

Lefeu concedes that revenge is “unmöglich” (meaning here unacceptable rather than impossible, 448) both in the abstract and as a concrete plan of action. In this light, *Feuerreiter*’s whisper is ridiculous: “Ridikül ist die ganze Idee, belachens- und beklagenswert” (441). Despite this assessment, at which Lefeu arrived with the “return to lucidity”¹⁰⁹ and subsequent reflection, the idea of revenge nevertheless lingers, provoked by the expression of “Husch” that references the burning of his parents, and which repeatedly resurfaces in Lefeu’s consciousness, even as *Feuerreiter* disappears (447f.).

The force keeping alive Lefeu’s desire for revenge is his *ressentiments*. Although he affirms the need for jurisprudence to regulate the repair of wrongdoing, the law does not help the injured victim who “verlangt nach der Zurücknahme des Erlittenen durch den Akt des Erleiden-Machens” (438). Because redemptive violence is proscribed by law and conscience (which Lefeu identifies as “das interiorisierte Gesellschafts-Gesetz”), the violated individual’s life is, according to Lefeu, who contemplates *ressentiments* on his return from Lacq to Paris,

bleibender beschädigt als es das vordem durch ein Erleiden, an dessen Zurücknahme er [=der Verwundete] noch hatte glauben können, gewesen war. Die Psychologie spricht von Ressentiments, das sagt nicht viel, wiewohl das Wort als solches von der Sprache gut erfunden wurde. In Tat und Wahrheit wird das unterdrückte Ressentiment, nicht anders als das vorgeblich durch Bewusstmachung und höhere Einsichten gleichsam von sich selbst gereinigte, zum Triebverzicht, der (...) grausam die menschliche Gestalt amputiert (...). Eine unauflösliche Kontradiktion zwischen dem sozial Gebotenen und Gebieterischen und dem spezifisch humanen Verlangen des Individuums nach Zurücknahme (oder vielleicht: Aufhebung der Irreversibilität und damit der Zeit) bricht auf. (439)

According to Lefeu—and his author Améry—, *ressentiments* grow out of the inability to fight back in self-defense at the time of injury. What pains him more than this

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 657.

inability is that society not only expects him to suppress the desire for revenge (as a belated form of self-defense), but to suppress *ressentiment* over the injury—even though Lefeu’s *ressentiment* is a moral demand to repair past injustice. What makes the postwar world hostile to Lefeu is the gulf between his moral demand and society’s prohibition. Where he seeks relief from a condition defined by his subjective “Gewissheit, dass er sein Überstehen nicht überstehen konnte, nachdem alles, was seines Namens und seiner Art war, (...) in den Feueröfen eines deutschgewordenen Ostens als Rauch in die Lüfte stieg” (455), the majority of Germans (symbolized by the gallerists) shrug off his *ressentiments* as the delayed late effect “eines historischen Missgeschicks” (457).

As in his previous “Ressentiments” essay, Améry defines *ressentiments* (via Lefeu) as the moral demand for the reversal of time, so as to undo history. Lefeu knows that his *ressentiments* have “kein Recht gegen die Zeit” (379), and that he is someone

der sich rückwärts wendet, was er doch um jeden Preis hätte vermeiden wollen, denn er weiß, dass die weiter schreitende Zeit allerwegen Recht hat gegen ihn: nur weil sie weiter schreitet, so einfach ist das, während er am Orte verharret oder gar ins Abgelebte flieht. (378)

Time, by its natural passing, is against him (382), and so is “die Wirklichkeit des geschichtlichen Geschehens” (406) that is shaped as much by the interpretation of events as by the events themselves. This interpretation of history is subject to the consensus of a majority that does not necessarily act reasonably or morally (391). Lefeu, whose *Neinsage* is an offensive “Gegenrede gegen den Diskurs der Zeit” (407)—against the discourse of time in general and the contemporary discourse of his present in particular—and the expression of his *ressentiment*, positions himself outside

society and trusts experience alone: “das blinde Selbstvertrauen” is the only mindset possible (406).

Against his “subjektive Evidenz,” a psychic fact that makes itself evident in the external world and by which his personal history and potential self ended “mit den Gräbern in den Lüften” (499), the natural passage of time has abetted the process by which society objectifies the past and, in the case of the Holocaust, historicizes it as the “banality of evil” (500). Améry writes in the epilogue that evil is banal only for those who enacted or witnessed it, never for those who suffered from it. While the passing of time may level all injustices in the eye of society, which calculates the well being of the larger society dependent on this leveling process, the injured individual views time as not so much leveling as prolonging those injuries. His subjective evidence of suffering runs counter to society’s objective and comparative evidence, according to which Hitler was “[e]in Schurke unter anderen” and Auschwitz “eine blutige Episode unter so vielen” (499). By society’s standard, concentrating the issues of history and time around the past injury amounts to “Geschichtsfälschung oder sogar Geschichtsblindheit” (500). In defense of a practice that concentrates on past injuries Améry offers no arguments but points to his subjective evidence, an affect that escapes objectifying historicization. To express it is not only his “Menschenrecht” but constitutes “Menschenwürde” as such.¹¹⁰ Although it violates the principles of reality, resistance against the passing of time constitutes humanness when faced with the irrationality of being.

Améry’s complete trust in the self, which is shaped entirely by its experience and his insistence on the moral superiority of his *ressentiments* include a “tiefverborgene Vision einer Gegenwelt” (333), in which Lefeu has an impact on the social consensus on how the crimes of the Nazis should be interpreted. The past stands

¹¹⁰ Améry, *Unmeisterliche Wanderjahre*, 313f.

irreversible, but the future can change the meaning of the past; through its reinterpretation, the past is altered despite the impossibility of its reversal. The future can “jede Vergangenheit in jedem Augenblick umdeuten und verändern” (442). Drawing on the example of his art, which may seem of little value to his contemporaries but may attract considerable attention in the future, thereby revising present judgment, Lefeu defines history as “das in der Zeit neu sich knüpfende Netz von Beziehungen und Meinungen” (380). If history includes not just the past but also its future interpretation, Lefeu still has the chance to affect history. Therefore he holds on to his *ressentiments*.

The Failure of *Lefeu oder Der Abbruch*

Just as he had done for his other essays, Améry extensively toured West Germany to promote *Lefeu oder Der Abbruch*. During a reading in Mainz, Améry identified his own insecurities regarding the success of *Lefeu*: “Die Frage des Gelingens bleibt offen.”¹¹¹

In her analysis of the book Lorenz concludes *Lefeu oder Der Abbruch* failed in both executing the essayistic novel (as compared, for example, to Musil’s *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*) and reaffirming the status of language. Unlike Musil’s “‘Möglichkeitsdenken’,” through which conflicting thoughts and interpretations lead productively to the full saturation of a topic, Améry’s attempt at reaching higher understanding collapses due to the increasing metaphorization of Lefeu’s reflectivity.¹¹² Lorenz makes particular note of the inclusion of an utopian idea in Musil and its absence in Améry.¹¹³ She defines the essay-novel in terms of its utopian perspective, in which an essayistic (circular) thought process opens up the possibility

¹¹¹ Page 3 of the four-page document “Lefeu-Lesung Mainz” (DLA 81.1448).

¹¹² Lorenz, *Scheitern als Ereignis*, 165, 167.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 175ff.

of overcoming crises. In Améry's essay-novel *Lefeu*'s circular movement of reflection does not permit him to discover new paths but spirals inward until it culminates in his own self-destruction. While I agree that *Lefeu* perhaps is a failure overall, at least by the standards Améry himself established, I do not agree with Lorenz that the failure lies in its rejection of a utopian perspective.

If Améry aimed to write an antidote to the *nouveau roman*, his intention was to correct particular shortcomings. In a 1964 article on the *nouveau roman* Améry had specifically criticized its lack of an omniscient narrator and its underdevelopment of characters, its missing chronology and opacity of plot, and the absence of "Vordergrundrealität" or "Banalrealität."¹¹⁴ The particular lack of descriptions of every-day life, through which novelists otherwise evince their adherence to Améry's conception of literature's social obligation, led him to condemn the *nouveau roman* and its strategies of alienation, although he admired some of its practitioners. Irrespective of whether Améry correctly captured the features of the *nouveau roman* and justly criticized it based on these characteristics, it is interesting to observe just how much *Lefeu oder Der Abbruch* fits his description of the *nouveau roman* instead of acting as its counterpoint. While *Lefeu* follows a relatively coherent chronology of events,¹¹⁵ its narrator is neither omniscient nor are its characters fully developed. The blurring of "Gedachtes und Gesprochenes," a practice Améry had criticized in 1964,¹¹⁶ is but one of the strategies of estrangement. The essay-novel's style, characterized by unmarked quotations from a variety of German literary sources, by neologisms ("Glanzverfall"/"Glanz-Verfall"), word play ("Pappellallee Geplapper"), the inclusion of French vocabulary, and the application of French grammar rules to German verbs

¹¹⁴ Améry, "Wege, Holzwege," 308.

¹¹⁵ Within the overarching chronology, which is easy to discern, a few short episodes are difficult to place in relation to each other or make it difficult to decide whether they happened at all. Cf. Jacques and Lefeu's dinner, chapter 4; Irene's possible suicide, chapter 6.

¹¹⁶ Améry, "Wege, Holzwege." 307.

("schmorera," 409), further this estrangement.¹¹⁷ The semantic confusion caused by Améry's peculiar style undermines the linguistic lack of ambiguity that he claimed to want to achieve. This becomes most evident in the description of his "Vordergrundrealität": in 1964 Améry had insisted that everything is communicable, including "Todesangst," which "innerhalb des Gefühls- und Chiffreschemas der Alltagsrealität erfahren und dem Mitmenschen mitgeteilt [wird]."¹¹⁸ As we have seen, Lefeu struggles to put into words precisely his traumatic memory of the deportation of his parents. By his own standard then, Améry's essay-novel failed on the level of both form and content.¹¹⁹

In his review of *Lefeu oder Der Abbruch*, Sven-Claude Bettinger throws up his hands and concludes that the book is "im Grunde genommen nicht zu rezensieren, weil nicht voll erfassbar."¹²⁰ While he designates *Lefeu* a "Meisterwerk," he wishes readers luck persevering ("durchhalten") and enduring ("ertragen") its pages.¹²¹ Bettinger's review is typical of *Lefeu*'s mixed reception. In his study of the overall reception of Améry, Rainer Brandenburg concluded that while the essay-novel received mostly negative reviews, almost all reviewers deeply regretted having to criticize it so harshly.¹²² The review in *Die Welt* thus ends with the judgment that

¹¹⁷ For a discussion of style in *Lefeu*, cf. chapter 6.4, Lorenz, *Scheitern als Ereignis*, 154-168. For an analysis of intertextual references, cf. Susan Nurmi-Schomers, "Blick aus dem 'Nocturama.' Intertextuelle Perspektiven auf Jean Amérys *Lefeu oder Der Abbruch*," in *Kritik aus Passion. Studien zu Jean Améry*, ed. Matthias Bormuth and Susan Nurmi-Schomers (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005), 145-74. For the inclusion of French and the Frenchification of German, cf. Jean Paul Bier, "Zum Begriff der Stilrelevanz. Mehrsprachige Stellen in *Lefeu*," *Jahrbuch für internationale Germanistik* 11, no. 1 (1979), 271-82.

¹¹⁸ Améry, "Wege, Holzwege," 308f.

¹¹⁹ Améry himself recognized the formalistic similarities between *Lefeu* and the *nouveau roman*. Cf. Améry, letter to Heißenbüttel, February 15, 1973, in: Améry, *Briefe*, 418. He even compares *Lefeu* with Heißenbüttel's work, indirectly asking his friend for forgiveness for having previously criticized it harshly. Cf. Améry, letter to Heißenbüttel, January 5, 1974, in: Améry, *Briefe*, 412f. (Note that the printed version incorrectly states the year. The letter was written in 1974, not 1973.)

¹²⁰ Sven-Claude Bettinger, "'Nein-Sagen' oder Kompromisse?," *Tribüne* 13 (1974), 5798-800, here 5800.

¹²¹ Ibid., 5799.

¹²² Brandenburg, "Zwischen Morosität und Moral," 77.

Améry's project "ist nicht gelungen, leider."¹²³ Another reviewer is conscious of his "hartes Urteil," which he articulates "mit aufrichtigem Bedauern."¹²⁴ *Die Zeit*, for whose review Améry traded in his freelance position, discusses *Lefeu* in neutral terms, although criticism lurks between the lines.¹²⁵ The Swiss *Tages-Anzeiger* summarizes the prevalent sentiment vis-à-vis *Lefeu*: the book is "nicht im üblichen Sinn 'lesbar'" but "peinlich" and "geht (...) dem Leser schlicht auf die Nerven"; however, because of Améry's humanistic commitment, his novel-essay will endure against time.¹²⁶ Even when reviewed for radio, where Améry had his most faithful supporters, reviewers, among them Helmut Heißenbüttel, expressed disappointment, however subtly.¹²⁷ Most newspaper reviews lamented the discrepancy between Améry's intention for an essay-novel and the final result, in which the essayistic reflection trumped the novel.¹²⁸

Améry was shocked by the reception of his essay-novel. Positive feedback on the manuscript and subsequent predictions for great success from editors and friends had led him to believe that *Lefeu* would be at least as well received as his previous publications had been.¹²⁹ Hubert Arbogast had predicted that book critics would have

¹²³ Karl Alfred Wolken, "Leben und Sterben des Malers Lefeu," *Die Welt*, September 12, 1973. Wolken calls the attempted essay-novel "doch nur einen Zwitter."

¹²⁴ Harry Neumann, "Die Verführung der Analyse. Amérys Porträt eines Nonkonformisten--mehr Essay als Roman," *Saarbrücker Zeitung*, October 31/November 1, 1974.

¹²⁵ Cf. Hans-Horst Henschen, "Auf der Suche nach dem Roman," *Die Zeit*, June 21, 1974.

¹²⁶ Jürgen Altwegg, "Ergreifendes Beispiel einer 'Condition Humaine' im 20. Jahrhundert. Jean Améry schrieb einen Roman-Essay in zwei Sprachen," *Tages-Anzeiger*, August 14, 1975.

¹²⁷ I refer to copyrighted material found at DLA. Heißenbüttel provided the manuscript for a radio review that aired May 2, 1974, at *Westdeutscher Rundfunk*. While the tone of his review is neutral, his only positive remarks regard the autobiographical intention of *Lefeu*.

¹²⁸ Cf. Martin Wettstein, "Trümmerhaufen der Ideen," *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, July 9, 1974. Wettstein compares the essayistic reflection to "einem unaufhörlichen Erguss nach dem Dammbruch" and laments the "Widerspruch zwischen Form und Absicht." Cf. Hans Bender, "Einer, der nein sagt," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, May 18/19, 1974. Bender criticizes Améry for following his intention "ohne Plan." Cf. Harald Hartung, "Elemente einer berausenden Befreiung. Über Jean Amérys kreisende Monologe," *Neue Rundschau* 85 (1974), 322-25, here 323. Hartung warns the reader not to trust the narrative: as novel, he concludes, *Lefeu* disappoints. However, read as a series of essays—as "kreisende Monologe"—*Lefeu* is worth the readers' time and attention.

¹²⁹ Améry is sure of positive feedback among his friends and peers within the *Literaturbetrieb* but fears the opinion of the general reader. Thus he writes to his friend Ernst Mayer: "Bislang habe ich fast ausschließlich gute bis begeisterte Urteile, aber das sagt natürlich nichts über die schließlich allein

“viel zu rühmen”¹³⁰ and that Arbogast had secured himself a “Fußnote in der Literaturgeschichte des Jahrhunderts” by having overseen the genesis of such an important book.¹³¹ However, the best known literary critic at the time, Marcel Reich-Ranicki, wrote a scathing review for the prestigious *FAZ*, mocking the essayist for having attempted to write literature by titling the review “Schrecklich ist die Verführung zum Roman.”¹³²

Reich-Ranicki begins his review with a short summary of Améry’s life and his achievements, noting the dubiousness of the Auschwitz survivor’s role as “moralische Instanz” in West Germany, into which Améry, according to Reich-Ranicki, the beloved specialist for the “unbewältigte Vergangenheit,” was forced. Without pursuing this interesting observation further, Reich-Ranicki blames Améry for having taken advantage of this situation by engaging in a project he would otherwise not have pursued: “auch er wollte einen Roman schreiben.” Rather than stressing that Améry wanted to write a novel in addition to essays (“er wollte *auch* einen Roman schreiben” vs. “auch *er*”), Reich-Ranicki insinuates that Améry is just one of many others who dream of a career as novelist, thereby belittling his intentions, intellect, and experience as writer. In the summary of *Lefeu* that follows, Reich-Ranicki includes the insulting remark that it is exactly those successful authors, “[die] den Wohlstand genießen,” who, to assuage their bad consciences over their wealth, create characters who are poor to fight struggles, “zu denen sie selber verständlicherweise nicht die geringste Lust haben.” Given the financial insecurity that Améry experienced for most of his life, this is quite offensive. Reich-Ranicki continues in this manner. Améry writes

relevante Durchschnitts-Meinung, die sich etablieren wird.” Améry, letter to Mayer, February 1974, in: Améry, *Briefe*, 441.

¹³⁰ Arbogast, letter to Améry, April 26, 1973 (DLA 81.2027/1).

¹³¹ Arbogast, letter to Améry, March 29, 1974 (DLA 81.2028/2).

¹³² Marcel Reich-Ranicki, “Schrecklich ist die Verführung zum Roman,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 1, 1974.

“wirr und oft geschmacklos,” his essay-novel is “eine oberflächliche Plauderei” and an altogether “literarische Degeneration,” a particularly ill-chosen term, given the Nazi’s labeling of Jewish art as degenerate (*entartet*). After accusing Améry of turning to the novel because he deemed it to be the lesser, and therefore easier, form of writing, Reich-Ranicki mocks Améry for his epilogue explaining why he had chosen the essay-novel. Reich-Ranicki ends his review: “[Améry liefert] gleich die Gebrauchsanweisung, die dem Leser und dem Kritiker die Lektüre erleichtern soll. Das ist menschenfreundlich. Aber wenn sich etwas nicht gebrauchen lässt, ist auch die Gebrauchsanweisung überflüssig.”

Several of Améry’s friends in literary circles were outraged by Reich-Ranicki and vociferously supported Améry, including Wolfram Schütte, who countered with a very thoughtful and positive review of *Lefeu oder der Abbruch* in *Frankfurter Rundschau*, in which he called it a “Proust’sches Meisterwerk.”¹³³ Neither his support nor that of Helmut Heißenbüttel, Rudolf Hartung, Horst Krüger, or Hans Paeschke mattered to Améry,¹³⁴ who tore up his personal copy of *Lefeu* as result of Reich-

¹³³ Wolfram Schütte, “Tabula Rasa oder am Ende doch eine Illusion? Jean Amérys Roman-Essay ‘Lefeu oder Der Abbruch’,” in *Jean Améry Werke. Bd. 9, Materialien*, ed. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2008), 189-201. Schütte’s review first appeared in *Frankfurter Rundschau*, July 6, 1974. Cf. Schütte, letter to Améry, June 20, 1974 (DLA 81.1921/5).

¹³⁴ Immediately following Reich-Ranicki’s review, Heißenbüttel wrote Améry a handwritten note (not on official letterhead): “Ich möchte Sie mir mit aller Überzeugungskraft, die mir zu Gebote steht, versichern, dass ich an Ihrer Seite stehe. Diese Reich-Ranicki-Kritik war ein Racheakt. (...) Eine Gemeinheit ohnegleichen. Etwas, das einmalig ist in der bundesdeutschen Nachkriegskritik. Sie müssen es nicht ernst nehmen.” (Emphasis in the original.) Heißenbüttel, letter to Améry, June 14, 1974 (DLA 81.1984/10). Heißenbüttel speaks of the “revenge” of another survivor, cf. Krüger’s explanation below.

To his editor Améry wrote that “der törichte Reich-Ranicki” came as a shock, but he continues: “Seit ich aber vor einigen Tagen mit Rudolf Hartung sprach, der mir versicherte, es werde R.R. eigentlich von keinem literaturverständigen Menschen mehr Ernst genommen, da er sich doch wiederholt der gröbsten und rohesten kritischen Missgriffe schuldig machte, bin ich, was die Qualität meiner Arbeit anbetrifft, doch einigermassen beruhigt.” Améry, letter to Arbogast, June 16, 1974, in: Améry, *Briefe*, 452. Hartung had initially asked to write the *Lefeu* review for *FAZ*, but Reich-Ranicki insisted on writing the review himself. Cf. Hartung, letter to Améry, March 13, 1974 (DLA 81.1967/8.)

Horst Krüger’s response is particularly interesting and might explain why Heißenbüttel spoke of revenge: “Zur Sache: natürlich hat Dir Ranicki mit der Gesamtbeurteilung Deiner lit. Existenz Unrecht getan. Selbst wenn man Lefeu für einen falschen Aufschwung oder eben eine Sackgasse Deiner Entwicklung halten sollte, so bleibt, was immer Du vorher geschrieben hast, in seiner moralischen-politischen Bedeutung für unsere Jahre ganz unangetastet. Nur Du, Du allein hast die Beschädigungen

Ranicki's review.¹³⁵ In a bitter article on book critics written almost a year later, Améry, who almost directly refers to Reich-Ranicki by addressing *FAZ* critics, lamented the lack of "Autokritik" among them: "Nur die frechsten Esel bilden sich ein, sie seien berufen, zu rechten und zu richten."¹³⁶ Reich-Ranicki's review hit Améry hard, and it discouraged him from pursuing his plan for his Macbeth novel. He wrote to Arbogast that because of the failure of *Lefeu*—"mein bislang bestes Buch (...), [das] mit Drittklasse-Begräbnis in die Erde versenkt wurde"—he would not work on the "Projekt 'Macbeth'": "Wenn die Leute das, was ich 'Roman-Essay' nannte, in der von mir erarbeiteten Form nicht haben wollen, hätte es keinen Sinn, trotzig oder trutzig darauf zu beharren. Also vorläufig: Macbeth out."¹³⁷ When discussing his next essay collection, *Hand an sich legen* (1976) Améry even feels compelled to reassure

aus der Nazizeit produktiv verarbeitet, ins Bewusstsein überführt und damit Deine Form des Überlebens gefunden. Das bleibt Deine Leistung. Dass R. sie so abwertet, ist wohl nur erklärlich, weil er sich dort getroffen fühlt. Er lebt ja—scheinbar—so weiter, als sei nie etwas gewesen, als schlosse 1945 ziemlich nahtlos an 1933 an: man könne als Jude so weiter machen wie immer: Seine Form der Verhärtung, die ihn stabil und steril zugleich macht. Immerhin ist er nach 10 Jahren Hamburger Isolation sehr glücklich, diesen Apparat jetzt in der Hand zu haben. Er spielt dort jetzt 'literarisches Leben,' sozusagen ein Fußballsolo. Noch einmal stellt sich ihm die Welt so dar, als drehe sie sich tatsächlich um Bücher und Literatur.“ Krüger, letter to Améry, September 9, 1974 (DLA 81.2055/6).

Hans Paeschke called Reich-Ranicki's review an "Attentat" and promises Améry a positive review in *Merkur*, for which he recruits Alfred Andersch. Paeschke, letter to Améry, March 7, 1974 (DLA 81.2067/2). Incidentally, Paeschke tried as early as March 1974 to convince Wolfgang Hildesheimer to review *Lefeu*, arguing that he would be "seiner malerischen Affektationen wegen der ideale Rezensent, von seinem Geschmack an Sprachreflexion ganz abgesehen." Paeschke, letter to Améry, March 7, 1974 (DLA 81.2097/2). Hildesheimer declined to review *Lefeu*, explaining that he had too much to do to fully engage with *Lefeu*, although he had read one third of the text and found it "faszinierend." Hildesheimer, letter to Paeschke, May 19, 1974, Hildesheimer, *Briefe*. 194.

¹³⁵ Cf. Heidelberger-Leonard, *Améry Revolte*, 290. The torn up copy is at the literary museum at DLA.

¹³⁶ Jean Améry, "Wozu Literaturkritik heute?," *Basler Nachrichten*, May 10, 1975.

¹³⁷ Améry, letter to Arbogast, February 21, 1975 (DLA 81.1644/1). Arbogast encouraged Améry not to abandon narrative writing altogether, and in 1978, Améry published *Charles Bovary* with Klett. In addition, he presented Arbogast with a proposal for a new narrative, *Rendez-vous in Oudenaarde*, which Arbogast deemed promising. Before Améry committed himself to working on the Oudenaarde project, however, he wanted to wait to see how *Charles Bovary* was received: "Wird man dieser Arbeit freundlich aufnehmen, dann und nur dann wird sie eine gute gewesen sein. Zweimal nun, erst mit 'Lefeu' und jetzt mit dem Charles B., habe ich versucht, mich vor den Deutschen als ein 'Dichter' auszuweisen, einst glaubte ich ja, dass ich ganz gewiss einer sei. Versuch a [=Lefeu] missriet zu rund drei Vierteln. Wenn er mit Ch. B. nicht besser geht, werde ich mir wohl sagen müssen, ich erlag von früh auf einem Irrtum. (...) Darum auch mein Zögern mit dem 'Rendez-vous in Oudenaarde.'" Améry, letter to Arbogast, August 29, 1978 (DLA 86.730/2). Améry did not finish the "Rendez-vous" project, an early draft of which is included in Pfäfflin, *Améry*.

Helmut Heißenbüttel that this time, after *Lefeu*, he would abstain from bringing any literary ambition to his work.¹³⁸ Just a few months before his death, Améry again decried the fact that the German public was interested only in the “‘Essayisten’ J.A.,” but not the writer. At that time he predicted that what *Lefeu* needed was time in order to be appreciated.¹³⁹

In the preface to the 1977 edition of *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*, Améry noted the steady rise of anti-Semitism in West Germany with great concern and justified the republication of his 1966 essay collection with the following two sentences: “Hier wird wieder einmal mit dem Feuer gespielt, das so vielen ein Grab in den Lüften grab. Ich schlage Feuersalarm.”¹⁴⁰ Améry took the role of *Feuerreiter*, but not the arsonist *Feuerreiter* from *Lefeu oder Der Abbruch*, but Mörike’s early *Feuerreiter* who sounds the alarm to warn of danger. Despite his serious flirtation with ideas of revenge and redemptive violence, Améry never seriously considered either as a viable option for himself. His resistance was non-violent, but it was resistance nonetheless: against forgetting the “*moralische Kluft*”¹⁴¹ between victims and perpetrators that would not cease to exist unless the Germans acknowledged their crimes.

¹³⁸ Améry, letter to Heißenbüttel, April 24, 1975 (DLA 81.1608/4).

¹³⁹ Améry, letter to Arbogast, June 26, 1978 (DLA 86.730/1). Cf. Améry, letter to Wolfram Schütte, September 18, 1975 (DLA 81.1571/5). Améry wrote Schütte that it would take “so rund 30 bis 50 Jahre” until someone would appreciate *Lefeu* as much as Schütte had in his review.

Indeed, in his 1980 study of twentieth-century Viennese literature, Ernst Schönwiese, who justified the inclusion of Améry based on the author’s 1930s editorial work in Vienna, praised Améry as the last of the great German-language essayists. In spite of his essayistic achievement, however, Améry’s most important work is, Schönwiese continues, *Lefeu oder Der Abbruch*: “Mit seinem ‘Lefeu’ gehört er [=Améry] in der Literaturgeschichte an die Stelle, wo von den großen Prosa-Epikern unserer Zeit die Rede ist.” In an encyclopedic essay collection of German-language Holocaust literature, Heidelberger-Leonard, in her entry on Améry, goes so far as to calling *Lefeu oder Der Abbruch* the only prose piece in which “die Erfahrung Auschwitz so präsent ist.” Ernst Schönwiese, “Roman-Essay und Essay-Roman bei Jean Améry,” in *Literatur in Wien zwischen 1930 und 1980* (Vienna, Austria: 1980), 181-89, here 182, 185; Irene Heidelberger-Leonard, “Jean Améry. Die Poetik des Sagens,” in *Shoah in der deutschsprachigen Literatur*, ed. Norman Otto Eke and Hartmut Steinecke (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2006), 261-66, here 263.

¹⁴⁰ Améry, *Jenseits*, 17.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

CONCLUSION

The Nuremberg and Frankfurt Auschwitz trials were the most visible attempts at judicial *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* by the Allies and, later, the West German state. Though they laid important foundations for the slowly developing memory culture regarding the Nazi past, in fundamental ways the trials were insufficient to the task of working through the past. It fell to the political establishment and the literary-cultural community of a postwar democracy to provide modes of public remembrance and mourning for the German people and thus enable processes of working through.

The nascent Group 47 in particular assumed the role of a public German literary voice and conscience, but it rejected any suggestion of historical guilt and collective liability, washing its hands with the myth of a *Stunde Null*. As Klaus Briegleb convincingly argues, the group, whose members experienced World War II as soldiers in combat and therefore claimed “Schuldfreiheit” as their dogma, refused to engage in a discussion about the Holocaust, failed to problematize Jewish-German differences in West German society, and ultimately contributed to postwar anti-Semitism precisely because it considered itself ethically appropriate while disrespecting Jewish experiences.¹

Having observed the unfolding of judicial and literary failures, Wolfgang Hildesheimer and Jean Améry emerged as critical Jewish voices who sought to intervene into the construction of a national memory culture by challenging, revising, and correcting an incomplete German perspective on the past.

As my analysis of his oeuvre, with an emphasis on his novels *Tynset* and *Masante*, reveals, by the 1960s Hildesheimer already employed a register of ethical writing that articulated the complex, interconnected processes of mourning and

¹ Cf. Briegleb, *Missachtung und Tabu*, 12f., 15.

melancholia. Unlike more recent writers and scholars who focus on these categories, valorizing melancholia in particular, Hildesheimer did not prescribe them as exemplary modes of affective reparation. For Hildesheimer's narrators, mourning the victims of the Holocaust became an impossible task that led to an affective and communicative impasse of permanent melancholia. Once trapped in the cycle of melancholic behavior, the individual forgoes the salutary practice of working through for the dead end of perpetually acting out. Although Hildesheimer was an important contributor to the discourse on melancholia that led to its present privileged position, he ultimately rejected melancholia as unproductive. While Hildesheimer himself used a melancholy style for the authentic writing of his inner microcosm that included the complicated dimension of Auschwitz, he did not promise—or even hope—that it would lead to societal change. Through my reading of Hildesheimer I defend the melancholy writing style on the level of subjective experience but conclude that it does not present an ethically adequate response of literature to genocide because it does not elicit cooperation by others or encourage involvement that may lead to socio-political action.

In contrast to melancholia, *ressentiment*, as Améry conceived it, is an affect that seeks to engage the wider community. If met with empathetic attention, Améry's affect of *ressentiment* enables future socio-political dialogue between victims and their community. In the essay "Ressentiments" (1966) Améry argued for the moral superiority of *ressentiments* as the most appropriate ethical vehicle for criminal redress. Rather than promoting hateful acts of revenge, *ressentiments* admit the opportunity for former victims and perpetrators to work through their pasts together, pasts that are shared yet subjectively experienced in radically different ways.

In this regard melancholia is very different from *ressentiment*: those who articulate *ressentiment* demand a response from the addressee. They express

ressentiment to open a dialogue, and their *ressentiment* lasts only until others engage with it, at which point it is satisfied. Where for Hildesheimer melancholia ultimately constituted a subjective position that had validity on the personal level but did not directly call for socio-political action, Améry identified subjective *ressentiments* of Jewish victims of Nazi persecution as an objective criterion that determined where moral repair was needed in the public arena.

Implicit in the works of both Améry and Hildesheimer is the notion that coming to terms with the past requires that subjective experiences of victims of wrongdoing be recognized. The melancholic affect employed in the writings of Hildesheimer honors the subjective experience through quiet, fragmented contemplation of the individual's lost past. Yet melancholia, by itself, leaves both the individual and society in stasis, gaze affixed upon the past. *Ressentiments* as proposed by Améry use subjective experience as a social challenge to turn back and acknowledge responsibility for past wrongs, in order for victim and perpetrator to be able to look forward together. Though the articulation of *ressentiment* alone is not sufficient to provide solutions for moral repair, if met by response *ressentiments* serve as a bridge from an wounded past to a living future.

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